



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 18 AUG 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	08/17 Puyallup mobile homeowners must move
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/42-mobile-homeowners-forced-move-puyallup/V622YNC7ARHN7NZZXE7ZP5JIM/
GIST	PUYALLUP, Wash. — Forty-two mobile homeowners in Puyallup are being forced to move out, so a developer can make way for a new apartment complex.

City of Puyallup spokesperson Eric Johnson says 11 families have already relocated.

“This is a special situation,” said Johnson. “We have a development coming in and some of these residents are at risk.”

According to Johnson, families living in Meridian Mobile Estates were first notified by developer Timberlane Partners in November 2020. However, the COVID-caused eviction moratorium forced Timberlane Partners to press pause. In September 2021, signs were posted once again in the neighborhood informing residents that they had one year to relocate.

Johnson says the city has stepped up to help struggling tenants by hiring two bilingual case managers and is offering a \$5,000 relocation grant to each displaced household.

“As of now, over 90 percent of the households have applied for or received grants from the city,” said Johnson.

Johnson says there are a number of financial resources beyond that available to these homeowners. Among them: \$17,000 State Department of Commerce Mobile Home Relocation Assistance Grant, \$5,000 from Timberlane Partners, as well as vouchers from the Pierce County Housing Authority.

Homeowners KIRO 7 spoke with remain dissatisfied. They claim their landlord gave them little notice and has offered them a miserable amount of money.

Armando Aragon moved to Meridian Mobile Estates seven years ago. He says that currently he is paying \$700 a month in rent.

“I’m looking for another place for rent, but it’s very expensive here,” said Aragon. “Very, very expensive.”

Aragon wishes he and his neighbors had at least the option to buy the land their homes currently sit on.

“They don’t want to move but we don’t have another option,” said Aragon.

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HEADLINE	08/17 WHO: monkeypox cases rise 20% in week
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/08/17/switzerland-WHO-global-monkeypox-increase/1941660757890/
GIST	<p>Aug. 17 (UPI) -- Monkeypox cases jumped more than 20% across the globe last week, the World Health Organization said in a press conference Wednesday.</p> <p>More than 35,000 cases have been reported globally, most in Europe and the Americas. Twelve deaths have been reported.</p> <p>WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said most cases continue to occur in men who have sex with other men. He also stressed the importance of ensuring that the global supply of the monkeypox vaccine, called Jynneos, was made widely available.</p> <p>"We remain concerned that the inequitable access to vaccines we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic will be repeated and that the poorest will continue to be left behind," Tedros said.</p> <p>The vaccine can reduce the risk of exposure and lower the risk of severe infection.</p> <p>According to Dr. Rosamund Lewis, the WHO's monkeypox technical lead, the vaccine is a necessary precaution, even though it is not 100% effective.</p>

	"We have known from the beginning that this vaccine would not be a silver bullet, that it would not meet all the expectations that are being put on it, and that we don't have firm efficacy data or effectiveness data in this context," Lewis said. "People do need to wait until the vaccine can generate a maximum immune response, but we don't yet know what the effectiveness will be overall."
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HEADLINE	08/18 Lebanon lurches towards 'failed state'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/public-sector-paralysed-lebanon-lurches-towards-failed-state-2022-08-18/
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Aug 18 (Reuters) - It's a weekday, but 50-year-old Lebanese finance ministry employee Walid Chaar is not at work and hasn't been since June.</p> <p>He rushes to water the garden at his home in the hills south of Beirut, using the single hour of rationed state power to run the sprinkler. He then phones his mother, who is struggling to get a new passport at a state agency grappling with paper and ink shortages. "The public sector is at its end if we keep going like this," Chaar told Reuters.</p> <p>Like thousands of state employees in Lebanon, Chaar has been on strike for two months over the collapse of his salary caused by Lebanon's economic implosion - one of the world's worst in modern times.</p> <p>The public sector paralysis is spreading further - this week judges launched their own protest, while soldiers moonlight to feed themselves and government offices run out of power and basic office supplies.</p> <p>State infrastructure, already strained by years of unchecked spending, corruption and a preference for quick fixes over sustainable solutions, has reached breaking point.</p> <p>"We are in a state of collapse," said Lamia Moubayed of the Lebanese Institute of Finance Basil Fuleihan, a research center at the Ministry of Finance.</p> <p>In parliament, there is no fuel to run a generator for the elevator - so security guards run messages up and down the stairs between workers.</p> <p>Those registering a new car purchase with the department of motor vehicles were given handwritten notes instead of proper state-issued documents due to paper shortages.</p> <p>Commanders in Lebanon's security services are looking the other way as troops take on second jobs - typically prohibited, but now unofficially allowed as soldiers' salaries crash.</p> <p>The average public servant's monthly salary has dropped from around \$1,000 to barely \$50 - and counting, as the Lebanese pound loses more value by the day.</p> <p>That prompted tens of thousands of state employees - from ministries, local government bodies, schools and universities, courts and even the state news agency -- to strike.</p> <p>This week, 350 Lebanese judges will not show up for hearings, demanding a hike to their salaries, too.</p> <p>"The judges are hungry," said Faisal Makki, a founder of the country's Judges' Club - the judiciary's equivalent of a syndicate or union.</p> <p>Makki told Reuters the justice ministry had long been underfunded, so judges had for years been buying paper and ink for their office printers at their personal expense.</p> <p>"Now I can't do that because it means I couldn't afford to eat. This is definitely a failed state."</p> <p>'PRIMITIVE LIVES'</p>

In response, the government is rolling out piecemeal policies. In a two-month stop-gap, it agreed to increase daily benefits and provide social assistance to most state workers, effectively doubling take-home monthly pay - to just \$200.

But with food prices jumping eleven-fold and many restaurants and even service-providers charging in dollars, the olive branch has not satisfied Lebanon's roughly 150,000 public sector workers.

"No state employee is able to buy a kilo of meat or chicken except maybe once a month. Our lives have become primitive, and we are only buying basic necessities," said Chaar.

Nawal Nasr, head of a public sector employees association, said workers were demanding a five-fold salary increase and help with soaring education and health costs, but that has prompted fears of run-away inflation.

Meanwhile state revenues flounder as tax collection was halted for two months as relevant employees were striking.

Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati has said meeting all of the workers' demands "is impossible and will cause a broader collapse of the situation". Wage increases must come "within the context of a broader financial stabilization plan", he said.

A HOLLOWED STATE

But political factions have yet to reach consensus around such a plan - costing the government some of its highest-skilled workers. Nearly six in 10 state employees are either leaving or planning to leave - a pace not seen since the country's 1975-90 civil war, said Moubayed.

"These are not numbers, these are the best people in the Lebanese state... People we need for the recovery, for implementation of any structural reform plan Lebanon will eventually undergo," Moubayed said.

Chaar, who holds a PhD and heads a top finance ministry tax directorate after nearly three decades in public service, says he is demoralized and wants to leave Lebanon.

The public workers union he is a part of has lost roughly half its members, and its representative for aviation workers recently took a one-way ticket out of Beirut.

To those left behind, it feels like Lebanon's pile-up of problems is finally catching up.

"The past years destroyed all of our efforts," Chaar lamented as he recalled moves to improve governance via IT systems that have since crashed due to the crisis.

"Who will be left?"

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HEADLINE	08/17 UN: China mistreatment of Uighurs
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/united-nations-china-uyghurs/2022/08/17/id/1083560/
GIST	<p>A new report from the United Nations asserts that it's "reasonable to conclude" that Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities have been subjected to China's forced labor camps, along with other forms of inhumane punishment.</p> <p>There's also speculation of the Uyghurs, a Muslim minority, being victims of genocide at the hands of the Chinese government.</p> <p>The report — produced by Tomoya Obokata, the U.N. special rapporteur — likened the forced labor circumstances among Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic groups to a contemporary form of slavery, particularly in agriculture and manufacturing.</p>

Obokata also detailed China's [dual-system approach](#) to classifying Uyghurs and others in forced labor situations — "vocational skills education and training center system, under which minorities are detained and subjected to work placements," and also "poverty alleviation through labor transfer system, where surplus rural laborers are transferred into secondary or tertiary sector work."

The Chinese government's policies in the northwestern region of Xinjiang have been the subject of global scrutiny for many years.

More than one million Muslims, mainly Uyghurs, [have been detained](#) in "reeducation" centers over the last five years, according to Newsweek.

In 2020, China's top envoy in London reportedly said the centers were "in line with the principles and the spirit" of documents produced by the U.N. The government also said that concerns over forced labor [were a misunderstanding](#) of its poverty alleviation measures.

Last month, [Newsmax](#) host Greta Van Susteren conducted a two-part interview with Rushan Abbas, a human rights activist who has spoken out against China's alleged Uyghur concentration camps.

Here are some excerpts of Abbas' discussion on "[The Record With Greta Van Susteren](#)":

The host asked, what goes on inside the Uyghur camps?

"The most horrific things you can imagine," said Abbas, adding that the camp prisoners are immediately forced to give up any ethnic identity and must forsake their religion.

"They cannot speak their own language. They are forced to speak Chinese," said Abbas, who also heard stories of prisoners being regularly indoctrinated to Chinese political ideology.

"They're subject to inhumane treatment," said Abbas, adding that the prisoners are often [deprived of food](#), water and sleep. They also suffer from poor hygiene, the result of 40 to 50 people being herded in one room together.

The prisoners "are not given the opportunity to drink enough water," Abbas said, and the lack of sufficient food, water, sleep and proper restroom facilities is a true test "of how long the internal organs can last."

Abbas cites estimated reports of [more than three million prisoners](#) in the Uyghur camps, or roughly 25% of the total Uyghur population in China. "But today, the streets are empty [among the general population]."

The Chinese government — which doesn't support ideological religion, characterizing it as a "mental disease," according to Abbas — has demolished mosques and anything else associated with organized religion.

"Basically waging a war on Islam," Abbas said.

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HEADLINE	08/18 FEMA: Native American tribal outreach
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/native-americans-emergency-management-federal-agency-climate-and-environment-d09eefc46a2cc5247f290b339b0c0e54
GIST	The Federal Emergency Management Agency has developed a new strategy to better engage with hundreds of Native American tribes as they face climate change-related disasters, the agency announced Thursday.

FEMA will include the 574 federally recognized tribal nations in discussions about possible future dangers from climate change, and has earmarked \$50 million in grants for tribes pursuing ways to ease burdens related to extreme weather. Tribal governments will be offered more training on how to navigate applying for FEMA funds. The new plan calls for tribal liaisons to give a yearly report to FEMA leaders on how prepared tribes are.

“We are seeing communities across the country that are facing increased threats as a result of climate change,” FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said in a conference call with media. “What we want to do in this strategy is make sure that we can reach out to tribal nations and help them understand what the potential future threats are going to be.”

In recent years, tribal and Indigenous communities have faced upheaval dealing with changing sea levels as well as an increase in floods and wildfires. Tribal citizens have lost homes or live in homes that need to be relocated because of coastal erosion. Some cannot preserve cultural traditions like hunting and fishing because of climate-related drought.

Researchers say tribes have disproportionately been impacted by natural disasters and the federal government hasn’t fully funded its obligations to them. It was only in 2013 under the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act that federally recognized tribes obtained the ability to directly request emergency and disaster declarations. Before, they had to apply for disaster funding through the states.

The new strategy emphasizes making sure tribes know of every FEMA grant program and how to apply for it. The hope is this will give them an equitable chance at getting funding. The agency hopes to find ways to get around barriers like FEMA cost share, or the portion of disaster or project funding that the federal government will cover. In some cases, tribes simply can’t afford to pay their share.

“In those areas where we can’t, what we want to do is to be able to work with the tribes to help them find other funding sources to help them stitch together the different funding streams that might be out there,” Criswell said.

Another change under the new strategy is more FEMA staff meeting tribes on their land, a request the agency got from multiple tribes. This will include anything from in-person technical assistance in small, rural communities to appearing at large national or regional tribal events.

Bill Auberle, co-founder of the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals at Northern Arizona University, said this focus on regular interactions on tribal land is an immense development. More intimate discussions such as workshops, roundtables and webinars are “exceedingly important to tribes.”

“It’s one thing to send out a notice and say ‘We would like your response,’” Auberle said. “Some of those tribes are small but have very serious needs. FEMA can certainly appreciate that.”

In addition to making more funds available to tribes, FEMA could also help by providing things like technical support as tribes prepare for and adapt to climate change, Auberle said.

The push to ensure all tribes fully understand how to access FEMA assistance or other related grants will be done with webinars, tribal consultations or regular meetings with FEMA regional staff.

Agency workers will get trained as well, learning a historic and legal overview about tribal sovereignty and cultural sensitivities.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Return-to-office deadline showdown looms
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/technology/return-to-office-deadline-after-labor-day-sets-up-showdowns/ar-AA10Mkd0

A return-to-office showdown is coming in September.

Companies such as Apple and Peloton have told corporate and office-based workers in the US to come back next month, and whether they do will say a lot about the ever-shifting balance of power between bosses and their underlings.

If the latest calls for “RTO” sound familiar, they are: Last summer, many companies targeted Labor Day in the US and Canada as the inflection point for remote workers to return to their cubicles. The Delta variant of COVID-19 upended those plans, prompting leaders to look to early 2022, but the Omicron variant soon scuttled that. Apple has pushed back its RTO nearly half a dozen times in the past year.

Across companies, the delays confused and annoyed workers, making some firms unwilling to deliver specific mandates, instead trying to lure staffers back with perks.

Those days might be over soon. As the US economy and stock market deliver mixed signals about the outlook for growth, business leaders have decided to draw a line in the sand. Beyond Apple and Peloton, Royal Bank of Canada and Comcast have also told workers to return several days a week sometime after Labor Day, which falls on Sept. 5. Corporate chiefs like Jamie Dimon at JPMorgan Chase continue to bash remote work, raising concerns among some workers that staying home might be hazardous to their careers.

But demand for labor remains rock solid, providing skilled workers a good bit of leverage. Average office occupancy across 10 of America’s largest cities has barely budged in the past five months. In the battle of the boardroom versus the bedroom, something has to give come September.

“We believe post Labor Day will be a meaningful milestone” said Jay Jiang, finance chief at Dream Office, a Canadian real estate investment trust, which owns office buildings and parking garages in Toronto and other cities. “We’ll start to see a lot more traction after Labor Day and getting people back into the office.”

A milestone for senior executives could be a millstone for the rank and file. After more than two years of flexible work arrangements, many white-collar workers have grown accustomed to being able to work where and when they wish, freeing them up to care for kids, aging parents, or to simply escape endless Zoom calls and take a stroll in the backyard after lunch. According to the Future Forum, a research consortium backed by Salesforce-owned Slack Technologies Inc. that polls more than 10,000 so-called knowledge workers every quarter globally, most workers want that flexibility, and might leave if they don’t get it.

Most companies calling for September RTOs aren’t demanding workers get back to the office every day — by now, they know that’s a non-starter. Just one in five workers wants to be in the office all week, Future Forum found in its most recent poll conducted in May. Workers who are in cubicles Monday through Friday say they’re much less satisfied with their jobs compared with peers with more flexible arrangements, the survey found.

“People want the flexibility to go in or work from home, but when there’s a mismatch there, burnout goes up,” said Jim Harter, the chief scientist of workplace and wellbeing at pollster Gallup. “Getting that match right, between what the employer and the worker wants, is essential.”

To do so, companies are adopting hybrid schedules, even at Dimon’s firm JPMorgan, where about 40 percent of the workforce is in one day and home the next. Many hybrid plans call for workers to be in Tuesday through Thursday, which is what Peloton has planned. Another approach, laid out by Apple, also calls for three days in the office but lets individual teams select one or more of those days, an option that workplace consultants favor as it allows for some autonomy and recognizes that engineers, marketers, and salespeople don’t all work in the same patterns.

Just under half of US knowledge workers have some type of hybrid schedule, Future Forum has found.

	<p>Getting that hybrid formula right is tricky, and the September mandates suggest that leaders would rather tilt the scales on the side of in-person work, which they claim improves collaboration, coaching, and mentoring. Policies that were once merely recommended will soon be enforced, with companies tracking who's badging in and who's not.</p> <p>"For hybrid to continue to work effectively, we need to get the balance right and be a bit more deliberate about when and how we organize on site," Royal Bank of Canada Chief Executive Officer Dave McKay said in a memo to employees Tuesday. "That's why, as we move into the fall, I'm asking our leaders and colleagues to come together more often in person to work and collaborate."</p> <p>For some, that's a big ask. Among those dissatisfied with the amount of flexibility their job affords, 70 percent said they'd look for a new opportunity, according to Future Forum. Corporate chiefs seem fine with that, especially those at companies such as Peloton that have had to rein in costs as their once-meteoric growth rates stalled. For some firms, it could amount to a stealth layoff.</p> <p>"For those of you who don't want to return to the office, we respect your choice," Peloton CEO Barry McCarthy said in an Aug. 12 memo. "We hope you choose to stay, but we understand not everyone will."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Mutations behind monkeypox spread?
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/studies-see-mutations-behind-monkeypox-210548088.html
GIST	<p>Studies are under way to see whether genetic changes in the monkeypox virus are driving the rapid spread of the disease, the World Health Organization told AFP on Wednesday.</p> <p>The two distinct clades, or variants, of the virus were called the Congo Basin (Central African) and West African clades, after the two regions where they are each endemic.</p> <p>On Friday, the WHO renamed the groupings as Clade I and Clade II respectively, to avert the risk of geographic stigmatisation.</p> <p>It also announced that Clade II had two sub-clades, IIa and IIb, with viruses within the latter identified as being behind the current global outbreak.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the UN health agency specified that Clades IIa and IIb are related and share a recent common ancestor -- therefore IIb is not an offshoot of IIa.</p> <p>- Research into mutations - Clade IIb contains viruses collected in the 1970s, and from 2017 onwards.</p> <p>"Looking through the genome, indeed there are a few genetic differences between the viruses from the current outbreak and the older Clade IIb viruses," the WHO told AFP.</p> <p>"However, nothing is known about the significance of these genetic changes, and research is ongoing to establish the effects (if any) of these mutations on transmission and disease severity.</p> <p>"It is still early on in both the outbreak and laboratory studies to tell if the rise in infections could be driven by the observed genotypic changes in the virus, or are due to host (human) factors."</p> <p>There is also no information yet on what the mutations mean in terms of how the virus interacts with the human immune response.</p> <p>A surge in monkeypox infections has been reported since early May outside the endemic African countries.</p> <p>The WHO declared the situation an international public health emergency on July 23.</p>

More than 35,000 cases in 92 countries, and 12 deaths, have now been reported to the WHO.

Almost all new cases are being reported from Europe and the Americas.

Experts have been studying samples from cases.

"The diversity between the viruses responsible for the current outbreak is minimal, and there is no obvious genotypic differences between the viruses from the non-endemic countries," the WHO said.

- Renaming monkeypox could take months -

Meanwhile the WHO said its drive to rename monkeypox could take "a number of months".

The organisation has for weeks voiced concern about the name, with experts concerned that it is misleading.

Monkeypox received its name because the virus was originally identified in monkeys kept for research in Denmark in 1958.

However, the disease is found most frequently in rodents, and the current outbreak is being spread through human-to-human close contact.

The WHO has called for help from the public in coming up with a new name, with a dedicated website where anyone can make suggestions.

"We will update the public by the end of the year," the WHO said.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Natural gas prices spike to 14yr high
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/17/energy/natural-gas-inflation-heat-wave/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)US natural gas prices have skyrocketed to levels unseen since 2008, a spike that threatens to offset the benefits of falling prices at the gas pump.</p> <p>Natural gas futures surged 7% on Tuesday to close at \$9.33 per million British thermal unit (BTU), the highest closing price since August 1, 2008.</p> <p>Although natural gas futures cooled off a touch on Wednesday, they remain up about 70% just since the end of June. And natural gas is up a staggering 525% since closing at \$1.48 in June 2020 when Covid-19 had shut much of the US economy down.</p> <p>The summer spike is being driven in part by high demand as scorching temperatures through much of the country force Americans to crank up the air conditioning. That in turn has chipped away at relatively low inventory levels.</p> <p>"We've had this perma-heat wave cooking the United States," said Robert Yawger, vice president of energy futures at Mizuho Securities.</p> <p>As temperatures drop this fall and winter, the natural gas spike signals sticker shock for families. Not only is natural gas a leading fuel source for the electric grid, it's the most popular way to heat homes in America.</p> <p>"Depending on the weather, it could be a challenging winter," said Rob Thummel, senior portfolio manager at Tortoise Capital Advisors. "But not as challenging as in Europe. They are at risk of running out of natural gas. We aren't."</p>

Europe's natural gas prices are seven times higher

Europe's natural gas crisis is being driven by its reliance on energy from Russia, which has slashed natural gas flows to Europe in response to Western sanctions.

The European Union has been forced to lay plans to ration natural gas, a drastic step that will hurt families and businesses. Natural gas prices have skyrocketed so high in Europe that it threatens to send the continent's economy into recession.

For context, Europe's natural gas prices are trading at levels equivalent to about \$70 per million BTUs, according to Andy Lipow, president of Lipow Oil Associates. That is roughly seven times higher than prices in the United States.

But that is little consolation to Americans grappling with high prices at the grocery store, clothing stores and at restaurants.

Even as natural gas prices surge, oil prices have tumbled, helping to drive gasoline prices sharply lower. The national average for regular gasoline has dropped 64 days in a row, according to AAA.

Exports pick-up to Europe

Analysts say Europe's natural gas crisis is contributing to the higher natural gas prices in America, although it's not the main driver.

"Higher global prices are trickling down to the US. Natural gas has become a global commodity with the emergency of LNG," said Thummel.

The United States has stepped up its exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe in an effort to mitigate the impact of the loss of Russian gas.

"Every spare molecule we can find, we are shipping to the eurozone," said Yawger.

US natural gas production is lagging behind

But the bigger issue for US natural gas is the fact that inventory levels are below historical averages, leaving the market with less of a buffer and driving up prices.

"We entered this year at beaten-down levels and we never caught up," Yawger said.

Supply has failed to keep up with strong demand for gas. Thummel pointed to how US oil and gas producers are under pressure from Wall Street to spend less on expensive drilling projects and more on dividends and buybacks to shareholders.

"We need more US natural gas production. The production levels are too low," Thummel said.

The good news is that higher prices should, eventually, incentivize more production. And investors are not betting today's high prices will continue. The futures market indicates natural gas prices should be almost 50% lower at this point next year.

Then again, very few people thought a year ago natural gas prices would be at 2008 levels. And yet here we are.

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HEADLINE	08/18 Heat slams world's biggest economies
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/18/business/heatwave-global-economy/index.html
GIST	London (CNN Business) Estimating just how catastrophic climate change will be for the global economy has historically proven challenging . But this summer, it's increasingly evident how quickly costs can pile up.

Extreme heat and drought conditions are battering the United States, Europe and China, compounding problems for workers and businesses at a time when economic growth is already slowing sharply and adding to upward pressure on prices.

In China's Sichuan province, all factories have been [ordered shut for six days](#) to conserve power. Ships carrying coal and chemicals are struggling to make their usual trips along Germany's Rhine river. And people living on America's West Coast have been asked to use less electricity as temperatures soar.

These events "have the capacity to be quite significant for the particular regions that are affected," said Ben May, director of global macro research at Oxford Economics.

The extent of the pain could depend on how long the heatwaves and lack of rain last. But in countries like Germany, experts warn there's little relief in sight, and companies are preparing for the worst.

Extreme weather and an economic slowdown

It's not just the Rhine. Around the world, rivers that support global growth — the Yangtze, the Danube and the Colorado — are drying up, impeding the movement of goods, messing with irrigation systems and making it harder for power plants and factories to stay cool.

At the same time, scorching heat is hampering transportation networks, straining power supply and hurting worker productivity.

"We shouldn't be surprised by the heat wave events," said Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the London School of Economics' Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. "They're exactly what we predicted and are part of a trend: more frequent, more intense, all over the world."

China is facing its fiercest heat wave in six decades, with temperatures crossing 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in dozens of cities. Parts of California could see temperatures as high as 109 degrees Fahrenheit this week. Earlier this summer, temperatures topped 40 degrees Celsius in the United Kingdom [for the first time ever](#).

The global economy was already under pressure. Europe is at high risk of a recession as energy prices soar, stoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. High inflation and aggressive interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve jeopardize growth in the United States. China is grappling with the consequences of harsh coronavirus lockdowns and a real estate crisis.

"At present, we are at the most difficult point of economic stabilization," Chinese Premier Li Keqiang [said this week](#).

Something else to worry about

Extreme weather could exacerbate "existing pinch points" along supply chains, a major reason inflation has been difficult to bring down, May of Oxford Economics said.

China's Sichuan province, where factories have shuttered production this week, is a hub for makers of semiconductors and solar panels. The power rationing will hit factories belonging to some of the world's biggest electronics companies, including Apple ([AAPL](#)) supplier Foxconn and Intel ([INTC](#)).

The province is also the epicenter of China's lithium mining industry. The shutdown may push up the cost of the raw material, which is a key component in electric car batteries.

The neighboring city of Chongqing, which sits at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, has also ordered factories to suspend operations for a week through next Wednesday to conserve electricity, state media The Paper reported.

Forecasts for China's economy this year are already being downgraded as a consequence. Analysts at Nomura cut their 2022 projection for GDP growth to 2.8% on Thursday — way below the government's 5.5% target — while Goldman Sachs trimmed its forecast to 3%.

Germany's shrinking Rhine, meanwhile, has dropped below a critical level, impeding the flow of vessels. The river is a crucial conduit for chemicals and grain as well as commodities — including coal, which is in higher demand as the country races to fill storage facilities with natural gas ahead of the winter. Finding alternative forms of transit is difficult given labor shortages.

"It is only a matter of time before plants in the chemical or steel industry are shut down, mineral oils and building materials fail to reach their destination, or large-volume and heavy transports can no longer be carried out," Holger Lösch, deputy director of the Federation of German Industries, said in a statement this week.

Low water levels along the Rhine shaved about 0.3 percentage points off Germany's economic output in 2018, according to Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at ING. But in that instance, low water wasn't a problem until late September. This time around, it could lower GDP by at least 0.5 percentage points in the second half of this year, he estimated.

Economic sentiment in Germany continued to dip in August, according to data released this week. Brzeski said the country "would need an economic miracle" to avoid falling into a recession in the coming months.

In the American West, an extraordinary drought is draining the nation's largest reservoirs, forcing the federal government to implement new mandatory water cuts. It's also forcing farmers to destroy crops.

Nearly three quarters of US farmers say this year's drought is hurting their harvest — with significant crop and income loss, according to a survey by the American Farm Bureau Federation, an insurance company and lobbying group that represents agricultural interests.

The survey was conducted across 15 states from June 8 to July 20 in extreme drought regions from Texas to North Dakota to California, which makes up nearly half of the country's agricultural production value. In California — a state with high fruit and nut tree crops — 50% of farmers said they had to remove trees and multiyear crops due to drought, which will affect future revenue.

Without significant investment in upgrading infrastructure, costs will only keep rising, Ward of the London School of Economics noted. And the impact may not be incremental.

"There are signs these heat episodes are not just becoming slightly more intense and frequent over time. It's happening in a kind of non-gradual way, and that will make it more difficult to adapt," Ward said.

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HEADLINE	08/18 Farmers killing crops, selling cows
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/17/business/west-drought-farmers-survey-climate/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)Nearly three quarters of US farmers say this year's drought is hurting their harvest -- with significant crop and income loss, according to a new survey by the American Farm Bureau Federation, an insurance company and lobbying group that represents agricultural interests.</p> <p>This year's drought conditions are taking a harder toll than last year's, as 37% of farmers said they are plowing through and killing existing crops that won't reach maturity because of dry conditions. That's a jump from 24% last year, according to the survey.</p> <p>July was the third-hottest on record for the US and ranked in the top 10 for every state in the West except for Montana, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information. The US Department of Agriculture's weekly weather and crop bulletin ending the week of August 6 reported "rapidly intensifying</p>

drought gripped the central and southern Plains and mid-South, depleting topsoil moisture and significantly stressing rangeland, pastures, and various summer crops."

The AFBF estimates nearly 60% of West, South and Central Plains are experiencing severe drought or higher this year.

"The effects of this drought will be felt for years to come, not just by farmers and ranchers but also by consumers. Many farmers have had to make the devastating decision to sell off livestock they have spent years raising or destroy orchard trees that have grown for decades," said Zippy Duvall, AFBF president.

The AFBF survey was conducted across 15 states from June 8 to July 20 in extreme drought regions from Texas to North Dakota to California, which makes up nearly half of the country's agricultural production value.

In California -- a state with high fruit and nut tree crops -- 50% of farmers in the state said they had to remove trees and multiyear crops due to drought, the survey revealed, which will affect future revenue. And 33% of all US farmers said they've had to do the same, nearly double the number from last year.

Selling off herds

Farmers in Texas are being forced to [sell off their cattle herds](#) earlier than normal due to extreme drought - as water sources dry out and grass burns up. Farmers in the Lone Star state reported the largest reduction in herd size, down 50%, followed by New Mexico and Oregon at 43% and 41% respectively.

"We haven't had this kind of movement of cows to market in a decade, since 2011, which was our last really big drought," said David Anderson, a professor of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M [told CNN last month](#).

Access to water for livestock has been a key issue for farmers and ranchers this year, with 57% reporting local restrictions on water use, compared to 50% of farmers last year. Key water sources in places like Lake Mead and Lake Powell -- which are running below 30% of their full capacity -- typically provide water to 5.5 million acres of land in seven western states according to the AFBF.

On Tuesday, the federal government announced the Colorado River will operate in a Tier 2 shortage condition for the first time starting in January. That means Arizona, Nevada and Mexico will have to further reduce their water usage from Colorado River.

High inflation makes it harder for ranchers to salvage their land. The cost of diesel is falling but is still high, making it significantly more expensive to truck in additional water than in years past. The price of fertilizer for grass and crops and feed for animals also remains expensive.

Consumer impact

US consumers can expect to spend more on certain food products because of the drought, according to the report.

"For cattle and beef, once the market processes the excess animals sent to slaughter and has a smaller breeding herd to operate off of- [price increases] could be six months to well over a year. For specialty crops it could be immediate upon harvest," said Daniel Munch, an economist at the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Fruits, nuts, and vegetables overwhelmingly come from states that with high levels of drought. But farmers have been forced to forgo planting or destroy orchards. This will "will likely result in American consumers paying more for these goods and either partially relying on foreign supplies or shrinking the diversity of items they buy at the store," the report states.

	<p>For example, California grows 80% of the world's supply of almonds -- limiting other places US consumers can buy the popular nut. And shifting where almonds can grow is not easy -- as the crop needs a specific climate and soil.</p> <p>"In general, the outlook for the 2022 crop volume is more pessimistic than a month ago and much more than two months ago," a July report from The Almond Board of California notes. The key culprits were drought, low water supply, and the removal of orchards.</p> <p>The Bureau of Labor Statistic's August inflation report shows US consumers are spending 9.3% more on fruits and vegetables from a year ago.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Crimea attacks: new Ukraine strategy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/17/ukraine-defense-minister-special-forces-new-strategy/
GIST	<p>KYIV — Ukraine is hoping that a new strategy of attacking key military targets deep inside Russian-occupied territory will undermine Moscow's ability to hold the front lines ahead of an eventual Ukrainian counteroffensive to reclaim territory, Ukraine's defense minister said Wednesday.</p> <p>Ukraine's conventional forces lack the weapons and ammunition needed to launch a full-scale ground offensive to retake territory from the Russians, Oleksii Reznikov said in an interview. He said he expects that sufficient quantities will eventually be delivered in line with commitments already made by Ukraine's Western partners.</p> <p>In the meantime, Ukraine is seeking to erode Russia's military capabilities by attacking its most sensitive military installations from within.</p> <p>"We're using a strategy to ruin their stocks, to ruin their depots, to ruin their headquarters, commander quarters," he said. "It's our answer to their meat-grinder tactics."</p> <p>To that end, Ukraine is activating a "resistance force" under the command of Ukrainian special forces to carry out attacks far behind Russian lines, Reznikov said. The force was formed in January in accordance with a law passed last year, and in recent weeks has been activated in Ukrainian territory held by the Russians.</p> <p>Some spectacular explosions in the Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula over the past week have drawn attention to the emerging strategy, and to the role of Ukrainian special forces in implementing it. Ukrainian officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, have told The Washington Post that those forces were responsible for the Crimea blasts, at a Russian air base last week and at an ammunition depot and an air base on Tuesday.</p> <p>Reznikov reiterated the Ukrainian government's official position that it can neither confirm nor deny Ukrainian involvement in the Crimea attacks. But striking such targets does form a part of Ukraine's current military strategy, and Ukraine lacks weapons systems with the range to reach targets in Crimea from Ukrainian-controlled territory, he said.</p> <p>Crimea serves as Russia's main supply route for weapons and ammunition reaching the front lines across the swath of southern Ukraine that was occupied by Russian troops in the first days of the invasion. It is also used as a base for war planes launching missile attacks on Ukrainian towns and cities, making it a valid military target, he said.</p> <p>"They have their full depots of ammunition in Crimea and they deliver them to the south of Ukraine, the mainland. So we need to destroy them, like we did in the Kyiv campaign, to cut their logistics lines," he said. He was referring to the way Ukrainian forces interrupted Russian supply lines and eventually forced a Russian retreat from the Kyiv area in the first weeks of the war.</p>

Until last week, Russian troops — and even beach-going tourists — had assumed they were safe in Crimea, which was occupied and annexed by Russia in 2014, because it was out of range of Ukraine’s existing arsenal. Ukraine has been seeking longer-range weapons from the United States but U.S. officials have balked, citing fears that Ukraine could use them to attack Russian territory and perhaps trigger a wider war.

But Ukraine is not using U.S.-supplied weapons in the attacks, mitigating potential concerns in Washington that Ukrainian attacks on Crimea, which Russia regards as Russian territory, could lead to escalation.

“For our American partners it’s an absolutely convenient situation, because we didn’t use American weapons,” Reznikov said.

However, Ukraine’s Western allies have been involved in training the special forces that are responsible for the attacks, said Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to the head of the President’s Office. NATO partners have provided trainers to show the Ukrainians how to operate behind Russian lines, he said.

He and other officials call the new strategy “de-occupation.” Podolyak said its goal was to counter Russia’s “shock fist” strategy of slow advances on the ground, using artillery to pulverize towns and villages, then moving in only after soldiers and civilians have been forced to flee.

The main targets, he said, are ammunition and fuel warehouses and headquarters housing the Russian officers who command front-line troops. By hitting those, he said, “we break the active operational support and bleed the Russian army.”

Podolyak said the strategy also includes U.S. High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) delivered by the United States starting in late June. They are being used to strike similar targets but are confined by their maximum 50-mile reach.

They have nonetheless played a major role in recent weeks, blunting Russian advances in the eastern Donbas region that is the current focus of Russia’s military offensive. Since they arrived, the HIMARS have been used to destroy ammunition depots and command-and-control headquarters positioned behind Russian lines that had previously been out of range.

Taking the fight to Crimea will further impede Russia’s ability to sustain military operations in the south of the country, and notably the Kherson region, which Ukraine has indicated will be the first target of a counteroffensive, Reznikov said. The HIMARS have already succeeded in disrupting Russian supply lines to the city of Kherson, which depend on just three bridges across the Dnieper River that have been heavily bombarded by the high-precision rocket systems in recent weeks.

In Wednesday’s attack, Ukrainian media reports said at least 10 Russian soldiers were killed in a strike on a Russian command post in Nova Kakhovka, a town at one of the key bridges. The reports did not say what weapon had been used.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Court ruling: feds can pause oil, gas leasing
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/08/17/court-ruling-biden-oil-gas-leasing-pause/
GIST	<p>A federal appellate judge struck down a lower court’s decision that had stopped the Biden administration from pausing the auction of oil and gas drilling rights in federal lands and water, a key campaign pledge in the president’s plan for tackling climate change.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit vacated a district-court decision from last year in favor of Louisiana and a dozen other states, many of which rely on oil and gas royalties to fund their governments. Circuit Judge Patrick E. Higginbotham sent the case back to the lower court, writing that its initial decision stopping Biden’s moratorium on leasing was too vague to be valid.</p>

The latest ruling may help reinvigorate Biden's efforts to slow global warming by reforming the federal government's oil and gas leasing program. Emissions from fossil fuels extracted on federal lands account for nearly a quarter of the nation's heat-trapping carbon-dioxide pollution.

But the question of whether the oil and gas leasing program can be curtailed to address global warming has ping-ponged from one federal court to another, with none seemingly able to make a lasting decision. Curbing new extraction of oil and gas on public lands is further complicated by the politics of high gasoline prices as well as Democrats' recently enacted climate, health-care and tax package.

What happens next isn't clear.

By sweeping away the injunction, the appeals court gives the Biden administration a potential path to pause leasing again. But a compromise won by Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) in the new climate law mandates new oil and gas sales off the coast of Alaska and in the Gulf of Mexico. The legislation, called the Inflation Reduction Act, also tethers the construction of wind turbines along the East Coast and solar farms in many southwest deserts to ongoing oil and gas auctions, another painful concession for climate advocates.

Interior Department spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said the Biden administration is reviewing Wednesday's ruling.

Green groups were pleased with the decision. "This is a narrow procedural ruling, but it's a good result," said Mike Freeman, senior attorney at Earthjustice, an environmental advocacy law firm.

Some environmental advocates urged the Biden administration to stop new leasing. "We know that more leasing for dirty and dangerous offshore drilling and spilling threatens our oceans, climate, and economy," said Beth Lowell, a vice president at environmental group Oceana.

But Erik Milito, head of the National Ocean Industries Association, a trade group that represents both offshore oil and wind companies, said that the appellate court ruled on a technicality and that Democrats' new energy law ensures continued offshore oil and gas leasing.

"The case is now back with the district court for action consistent with this new opinion or for a decision on the merits," he said. "In either case, we could very well see another decision that rejects the leasing pause. In any event, the practical impacts may be minor in light of the mandates of the Inflation Reduction Act."

During the 2020 race, Biden pledged to halt new oil and gas drilling — "period, period, period," he said on the campaign trail. One of Biden's first actions in office was to pause leasing to review the program.

"Their original plan was to take a timeout," Earthjustice's Freeman said, adding that reforms were "much needed" not only to address climate change but also to reduce impacts on wildlife and improve returns for taxpayers.

But U.S. District Judge Terry A. Doughty in Louisiana struck down Biden's Jan. 27, 2021, executive order, at the time dealing a major blow to the president's plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The decision by Doughty, an appointee of President Donald Trump, highlights the challenge in curbing fossil fuel production when current law directs the government to hold auctions. The authority to suspend oil and gas leasing lies "solely with Congress," Doughty wrote.

After the moratorium was struck down, the Interior Department held the largest offshore oil and gas lease sale in the nation's history, putting 80 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico up for auction.

But only a fraction of that area — about 1.7 million acres — actually sold, and before the leases could take effect, yet another federal judge invalidated the entire sale. That decision from the U.S. District Court for

	<p>the District of Columbia found that the government had justified the sale using a flawed analysis written during the Trump administration, which assumed that the climate impacts would be worse if the acreage went unsold.</p> <p>In an effort to win Manchin over to a climate deal, the Biden administration left open the door to more offshore drilling in a proposal issued earlier this summer. But Kevin Book, a managing director at the consulting firm ClearView Energy Partners, said the administration has considerable leeway to constrain new drilling.</p> <p>The recent court ruling, he wrote in a note Wednesday, “does not change our existing expectation for the Biden Administration to pursue the smallest number of onshore and offshore lease sales necessary to enable green energy development.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 US Marshals immigration sanctuary policy?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/17/federal-sanctuary-marshals-service-stop-holding-il/
GIST	<p>The U.S. Marshals Service is drafting a sanctuary policy that would limit the agency’s ability to hold illegal immigrants for pickup by ICE, The Washington Times has learned.</p> <p>Under the policy, marshals would not be able to hold illegal immigrants for pickup by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on the say-so of an immigration warrant, or “detainer” request. Once the Marshals Service is finished processing an immigrant for its custody purposes, the person is to be released even if ICE has asked for a hold.</p> <p>Officials said the policy is still in draft form, though The Times knows of one jurisdiction in Florida where it has already been implemented, according to a memo sent to employees this summer.</p> <p>“Per our management staff, effective immediately, we will NOT house a prisoner based solely on an administrative immigration detainer,” a deputy wrote to fellow deputies in the Fort Lauderdale office.</p> <p>“We will relay the reason that the inmate is being released from USMS custody and that the USMS cannot hold the subject beyond the standard out-processing time, nor may we transport the subject for DHS,” the deputy added.</p> <p>The office said marshals will give “a reasonable amount” of advance notice so ICE can try to send officers to detention facilities in time to pick up immigrants.</p> <p>The Marshals Service houses about 60,000 people on any given day. Some of them are deportable migrants, and ICE wants to take custody when they are released.</p> <p>ICE officers told The Washington Times that the policy change will be a blow.</p> <p>They said a bigger worry is that other Justice Department agencies will follow suit. The Federal Bureau of Prisons turns over an even larger number of migrants to ICE.</p> <p>The Marshals Service headquarters in Washington confirmed it is drafting a new policy.</p> <p>“The proposed updates incorporate language clarifying the agency’s long-standing practice of not holding prisoners beyond a judicial order. The USMS is not authorized to hold prisoners beyond a judicial order requiring their release or the expiration of a sentence imposed,” the service said.</p> <p>The service didn’t disclose what prompted the draft policy but said it considered the update a confirmation of current practices.</p>

“No changes have been made to the policy limiting cooperation with ICE or any law enforcement entity,” the service said.

Current and former ICE officials said the policy is indeed a shift.

“It has always been USMS policy to honor immigration detainers, going back to when both USMS and then-INS were both Justice Department agencies,” said Dan Cadman, a former senior ICE official and now a fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies.

He called the Marshals Service’s claim that it wasn’t a change in policy “a case of policy spin approaching bald-faced lie.”

“Keep in mind that if someone’s in USMS custody, it’s because they’ve committed a federal violation, and almost certainly a felony (or possibly several),” he said. “This is just another example of the pernicious politicization of Merrick Garland’s Justice Department and Alejandro Mayorkas’ Homeland Security Department.”

Mr. Cadman said the Marshals Service must have coordinated with Homeland Security on the changes, which suggests that ICE didn’t object.

The Times reached out to ICE, which referred questions back to the Marshals Service.

ICE detainers are the bread and butter of the immigration agency’s work. They are requests to fellow law enforcement agencies to hold immigrants for pickup for potential deportation after the other agency is finished with them.

For example, a state prison would be asked to turn over targets who have completed their sentences. Local police are asked to hold immigrants they arrest but don’t immediately jail.

Deportations are a civil matter, not a criminal penalty, and the detainer requests are warrants signed by deportation officers and aren’t approved by a federal court.

For many state and local law enforcement agencies, that fact has made detainers optional — and the agencies have decided to ignore them. Indeed, the use and efficacy of detainers have dropped in recent years.

ICE issued 177,147 detainers in 2018 and 165,487 in 2019, but just 122,233 in 2020. The number of detainers honored in 2020 dropped by 26%.

The agency declined to release its numbers for 2021.

The Marshals Service secures federal courthouses, tracks down fugitives and, relevant to ICE’s work, houses and transports people awaiting trial and handles processing if a judge orders their release.

If an immigrant is ordered released by a judge but is subject to an ICE detainer, the Marshals Service would routinely hold the person for pickup. ICE requests up to 48 hours of extra time.

The Marshals Service also works with ICE on space for ICE’s detainees. That allows the immigration agency to use beds under contracts between the Marshals Service and state and local prisons and jails.

The policy in development would make the Marshals Service a limited sanctuary. It would still allow notification but would deny the full level of compliance ICE seeks by refusing to detain for pickup.

The Marshals Service has been following a sanctuary-style policy in the District of Columbia for two years after a federal judge ruled against ICE detainers.

	<p>Senior Judge Royce C. Lamberth said the Marshals Service doesn't have independent powers to enforce immigration laws. He said its chief duty is to carry out orders of federal courts.</p> <p>Because ICE isn't a part of the courts and its detainees aren't issued under any court's purview, the Marshals Service cannot justify holding an immigrant based on a detainee.</p> <p>Judge Lamberth's ruling was confined to the District of Columbia.</p> <p>It's not clear what role the D.C. changes are playing in the Marshals Service's broader policy update.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Day 176 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/18/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-176-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Russian strike on Kharkiv killed at least seven people and wounded 16 others, Ukraine's state emergencies services said. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said a block of flats was "totally destroyed ... We will not forgive, we will take revenge." • Russia has replaced the commander of its Crimea-based Black Sea fleet after explosions rocked the peninsula this week. Russia's RIA news agency cited sources as saying Igor Osipov had been replaced with Viktor Sokolov. If confirmed, it would mark one of the most prominent sackings of a military official in the war so far. • Chinese troops will travel to Russia to take part in joint military exercises "unrelated to the current international and regional situation", China's defence ministry has said. Other countries will include India, Belarus, Mongolia and Tajikistan. In July, Moscow announced plans to hold "Vostok" exercises from 30 August to 5 September. • Ukrainian authorities performed disaster response drills near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant on Wednesday. This followed repeated shelling at the Russian-occupied plant, the largest of its kind in Europe. • The main bridge connecting Crimea to the Russian mainland must be "dismantled", the Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said. The 19-km (12-mile) Kerch Bridge is Moscow's key military and civilian land corridor to the peninsula. "The bridge is an illegal object," Podolyak said. It "must therefore be dismantled. Not important how – voluntary or not", implying the bridge could become a military target for Ukrainian forces. • The top official in Russian-annexed Crimea has claimed the FSB security service has broken up a six-person terrorist cell of a banned Islamist group. It followed a series of strikes on Russian bases and other infrastructure across the region that Russia has sought to blame on sabotage. • At least 12 Russians were reportedly killed in a strike on a base in the occupied city of Nova Kakhovka, according to the Ukrainian military. Footage posted to Telegram by the state border guard service showed numerous burnt-out trucks, collapsed buildings, and debris. • Ukraine has not lost any US-supplied Himars rocket launchers, the Ukrainian defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said in contradiction to Russian claims. Ukraine has received at least 20 of the US-made launchers, and has used them to attack Russian ammunition depots, command posts, and air defences. • The mayor of the village of Verkhnyo Rogachytsk in the Kherson region has been kidnapped, according to the deputy chair of the regional council. Yuri Sobolevsky said Svitlana Ivanivna was taken from her home at about 11am on Tuesday. • The first wartime shipment of UN food aid for Africa reached the Bosphorus Strait on Wednesday under a UN-backed deal to restore Ukrainian grain deliveries across the Black Sea. Marine traffic sites showed the MV Brave Commander taking its cargo of 23,000 tonnes of wheat across the heart of Istanbul bound for its final destination in Djibouti next week. • The leaders of Ukraine, Turkey and the UN are set to meet to review the grain export deal in Lviv on Thursday. The UN secretary general, António Guterres, Zelenskiy, and the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, will also discuss "the need for a political solution to this

	<p>conflict” and the situation at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada has disbursed C\$450m (\$348m) in loans for the purchase of heating fuel before winter for Ukraine, the finance minister in Ottawa, Chrystia Freeland, has announced. • Russia foresees a 38% rise in energy export earnings this year due to higher oil export volumes, coupled with rising gas prices, according to an economy ministry document seen by Reuters. Russia’s earnings from energy exports are forecast to reach \$337.5bn this year, a 38% rise on 2021.
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HEADLINE	08/17 Russia soldier: rot at core Ukraine invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/i-dont-see-justice-in-this-war-russian-soldier-exposes-rot-at-core-of-ukraine-invasion
GIST	<p>Pavel Filatyev knew the consequences of what he was saying. The ex-paratrooper understood he was risking prison, that he would be called a traitor and would be shunned by his former comrades-in-arms. His own mother had urged him to flee Russia while he still could. He said it anyway.</p> <p>“I don’t see justice in this war. I don’t see truth here,” he said over a tucked-away cafe table in the Moscow financial district. It was his first time sitting down in person with a journalist since returning from the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>“I am not afraid to fight in war. But I need to feel justice, to understand that what I’m doing is right. And I believe that this is all failing not only because the government has stolen everything, but because we, Russians, don’t feel that what we are doing is right.”</p> <p>Two weeks ago, Filatyev went on to his VKontakte social media page and published a 141-page bombshell: a day-by-day description of how his paratrooper unit was sent to mainland Ukraine from Crimea, entered Kherson and captured the seaport, and dug in under heavy artillery fire for more than a month near Mykolaiv – and then how he eventually was wounded and evacuated from the conflict with an eye infection.</p> <p>By then, he was convinced he had to expose the rot at the core of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. “We were sitting under artillery fire by Mykolaiv,” he said. “At that point I already thought that we’re just out here doing bullshit, what the fuck do we need this war for? And I really had this thought: ‘God, if I survive, then I’ll do everything that I can to stop this.’”</p> <p>He spent 45 days writing his memoirs from the conflict, breaking an omerta under which even the word war has been banished in public. “I simply can’t stay quiet any longer, even though I know that I probably won’t change anything, and maybe I’ve acted foolishly to get myself in so much trouble,” says Filatyev, his fingers shaking from stress as he lit another cigarette.</p> <p>His memoir, ZOV, is named for the tactical markings painted on Russian army vehicles that have been adopted as a pro-war symbol in Russia. Until now, there has been no more detailed, voluntary account from a Russian soldier participating in the invasion of Ukraine. Extracts were published in Russia’s independent press, while Filatyev appeared via video for a televised interview on TV Rain.</p> <p>“It’s very important that someone became the first to speak out,” said Vladimir Osechkin, the head of the human rights network Gulagu.net, who helped Filatyev leave Russia earlier this week. That also made Filatyev the first soldier known to have fled Russia due to opposition to the war. “And it’s opening a Pandora’s box.”</p> <p>This week the Russian investigative site iStories, which Russia has banned from the country, has published a confession from another Russian soldier admitting on camera to shooting and killing a civilian resident in the Ukrainian city of Andriivka.</p>

Filatyev, who served in the 56th Guards air assault regiment based in Crimea, described how his exhausted and poorly equipped unit stormed into mainland Ukraine behind a hail of rocket fire in late February, with little in terms of concrete logistics or objectives, and no idea why the war was taking place at all. “It took me weeks to understand there was no war on Russian territory at all, and that we had just attacked Ukraine,” he said.

At one point, Filatyev describes how the ravenous paratroopers, the elite of the Russian army, captured the Kherson seaport and immediately began grabbing “computers and whatever valuable goods we could find”. Then they ransacked the kitchens for food.

“Like savages, we ate everything there: oats, porridge, jam, honey, coffee ... We didn’t give a damn about anything, we’d already been pushed to the limit. Most had spent a month in the fields with no hint of comfort, a shower or normal food.

“What a wild state you can drive people to by not giving any thought to the fact that they need to sleep, eat and wash,” he wrote. “Everything around gave us a vile feeling; like wretches we were just trying to survive.”

Filatyev took a deep drag from a cigarette as he recounted the story, nervously looking around for anyone watching him at close to midnight in a Moscow park, then tries to explain.

“I know it will sound savage to a foreign reader,” he said, describing a fellow soldier stealing a computer. “But [the soldier] knows that this is worth more than one of his salaries. And who knows if he’ll be alive tomorrow anyway. So he takes it. I’m not trying to justify what he’s done. But I think it’s important to say why people act like this, to understand how to stop them ... What a person will do in these kinds of extreme situations.”

He railed at length against what he called the “degradation” of the army, including the use of dated kit and vehicles that left Russian soldiers exposed to Ukrainian counterattacks. The rifle he was given before the war was rusted and had a broken strap, he said.

“We were just an ideal target,” he wrote, describing travelling to Kherson on obsolete and unarmoured UAZ trucks that sometimes stood in place for 20 minutes. “It was unclear what the plan was – as always no one knew anything.”

Filatyev describes his unit, as the war dragged on, being pinned down in trenches for nearly a month near Mykolaiv under Ukrainian artillery fire. It was there that a shell blasted mud into his eye, leading to an infection that nearly blinded him.

As frustrations grew on the front, he wrote about reports of soldiers deliberately shooting themselves in order to escape the front and collect 3 million roubles (£40,542) in compensation, as well as rumours of acts of mutilation against captured soldiers and corpses.

In the interview, he said he had not personally seen the acts of abuse carried out during the war. But he described a culture of anger and resentment in the army that tears down the facade of total support for the war portrayed in Russian propaganda.

“Most people in the army are unhappy about what’s going on there, they’re unhappy about the government and their commanders, they’re unhappy with Putin and his politics, they’re unhappy with the minister of defence, who has never served in the army,” he wrote.

Since going public, he said, his entire unit has cut contact with him. But he believed that 20% of them supported his protest outright. And many others, in quiet conversations, had told him about a grudging sense of respect for the patriotism of Ukrainians fighting to defend their own territory. Or had complained about mistreatment by Russia of its own soldiers.

“No one is treating veterans here,” he said at one point. In military hospitals, he described meeting disgruntled soldiers, including wounded sailors from the Moskva cruiser, sunk by Ukrainian missiles in April, shouting a senior officer out of the room. And, in ZOV, he claimed that “there are heaps of dead, whose relatives have not been paid compensation”, corroborating media reports of wounded soldiers waiting months for payouts.

Filatyev’s original plan was to publish his memoir and immediately turn himself in to the police. But Osechkin, the activist, told him to reconsider while urging him repeatedly to flee the country. Until this week, he had refused to do so.

“So I leave, I go to America, and who am I there? What am I supposed to do?” he said. “If I’m not even needed in my own country, then who needs me there?”

That was why, for two weeks, Filatyev had been staying in a different hotel every night and living out of a heavy black knapsack he carried with him, trying to stay one step ahead of the police. Even then, he admits, he should not have been hard to find.

The Guardian has not been able to independently verify all the details of Filatyev’s story, but he has supplied documents and photographs showing he was a paratrooper with the 56th airborne regiment stationed in Crimea, that he was hospitalised with an eye injury sustained while “performing special tasks in Ukraine” in April and that he had written directly to the Kremlin with his complaints about the war before going public.

Old photographs show Filatyev as a teenager in a blue-and-white telnyashka (the traditional blue and white undershirt worn by military personnel) among his fellow soldiers, then hanging from a carousel during paratrooper training, then, already older, clean-shaven in tan camouflage posing with a rifle in Crimea before the war began.

Born into a military family in the southern city of Volgograd, Filatyev, 34, spent much of his early 20s in the army. After serving in Chechnya in the late 2000s, he spent nearly a decade as a horse trainer, working for the Russian meat-producing company Miratorg and wealthy clients before reenlisting in 2021 for financial reasons, he said.

Now he is a changed man. He remains powerfully built and articulate, but war and stress have taken their toll. His scarred cheeks are covered by a two-week old stubble. He still can’t see properly out of his right eye. And he laughs bitterly at having to complain about the Russian army to a foreign journalist and “coming to talk to you like a priest over beers”.

“They say that the heroism of some is the fault of others,” he said. “It’s the 21st century, we started this idiotic war, and once again we’re calling on soldiers to carry out heroic deeds, to sacrifice themselves. What’s the problem – are we not dying out at it is?”

Most of all, he wondered why he was still free. He had heard that his unit was preparing to charge him with desertion, an accusation that could land him in prison for many years. And yet nothing happened.

“I don’t understand why they still haven’t snatched me up,” he says upon meeting at a train station in Moscow. “I’ve said more than anyone has for the last six months. Maybe they don’t know what to do with me.”

It is a mystery he may never solve. Filatyev fled the country via an undisclosed route sometime after Saturday evening, when he headed off to find a hostel to spend the night. Two days later, Osechkin announced Filatyev had managed to escape Russia “before his arrest”. It is still unclear whether or not he has been charged formally with any crime in Russia.

“Why should I have to flee my country just for telling the truth about what these bastards have turned our army into,” Filatyev wrote in a Telegram message. “I am overwhelmed by emotions that I have had to leave my country.”

He remains one of just a handful of Russian soldiers to have spoken out publicly about the war, albeit after months of agonising about how to do so without violating his service. “People ask me why I didn’t throw down my weapon,” he said. “Well I’m against this war, but I’m not a general, I’m not the defence minister, I’m not Putin – I don’t know how to stop this. I wouldn’t have changed anything to become a coward, and throw down my weapon and abandon my comrades.”

Sitting along the busy streets of Moscow for possibly the last time, he said he hoped this would all come to an end after popular protests like during the Vietnam war. But for now, he said, that seemed far off.

“I am just terrified of what happens next,” he said, imagining Russia fighting for total victory despite the terrible cost. “What will we pay for that? Who will be left in our country? ... For myself I said that this is a personal tragedy. Because what have we become? And how can it get any worse?”

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HEADLINE	08/17 ‘Panicking’ Russians flee Crimea
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/russians-are-realising-crimea-is-not-a-place-for-them-says-zelenskiy
GIST	<p>Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has said that panicking Russians have realised that Crimea is “not a place for them” after three mysterious and devastating strikes on the peninsula over the past week, thought to have been carried out by Ukrainian operatives.</p> <p>In his latest video address Zelenskiy said long queues of cars streaming across the Crimea Bridge leading to the Russian mainland proved that the “absolute majority” of Russian citizens had got the message. At least 38,000 cars crossed on Tuesday – a record.</p> <p>The mass exit came after an ammunition dump and electricity sub-station blew up near the town of Dzhankoi, a significant railway hub. Another apparent Ukrainian strike took place outside the regional capital Simferopol, where a Russian airbase was destroyed.</p> <p>Zelenskiy hinted that similar inventive attacks could be expected. He urged Ukrainians living in Crimea and the occupied south to stay away from enemy command posts and logistics bases. “Do not approach the military objects of the Russian army,” he said.</p> <p>These might also explode because of “bungling”, he added, describing his country’s struggle against Russian occupiers as a “people’s war of liberation”. Millions of Ukrainians were fighting against a “terrorist state”, he added.</p> <p>In its latest intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defence said Russia’s military leaders were likely to be “increasingly concerned” about the surge of setbacks in Crimea. The defence ministry in Moscow has vowed to deal with what it called local “sabotage”.</p> <p>Six alleged Islamist extremists were detained on Wednesday, according to Crimea’s Moscow-appointed head, Sergey Aksyonov. It was not clear what relation – if any – those arrested had to the recent attacks, which include a strike last week on the Saky aerodrome.</p> <p>At about 3am on Wednesday Russian strategic aircraft bombed the port city of Odesa, firing two long-range missiles. Four people were wounded. The rockets set fire to a recreation centre in the region and several homes nearby.</p>

The Kremlin's initial war aim was to seize Odesa, a Russian-speaking city founded by Catherine the Great, and to link up with the Moldovan enclave of Transnistria, where Russian "peacekeeping" troops are based.

The plan unravelled when Ukrainian forces halted attempts to capture the neighbouring city of Mykolaiv and sank Russia's flagship carrier, the Moskva. Since then the amphibious threat to Odesa has been largely neutralised, military analysts believe.

There are growing signs that Moscow is planning to press ahead next month with a "referendum" to annex the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. A Ukrainian counter-offensive to recapture the city of Kherson occupied since March has yet to happen.

In the run-up to the "vote", Russian soldiers have been hunting down local community leaders. The latest victim was Svitlana Korotun, the mayor of the village of Verkhny Rohchyk. She was kidnapped for refusing to cooperate with the Russians, and has disappeared, regional officials said.

In the occupied southern city of Melitopol explosions reportedly took place near a Russian command centre. Details were sketchy. The area is at the centre of a significant partisan uprising, which has involved harsh countermeasures enacted by Russian troops, and so-called "filtration" of entire districts.

Writing on Telegram, Melitopol's mayor-in-exile, Ivan Fedorov, said that a "loud explosion rang out near the enemy's lair" in the centre of the city. "Let me remind you that one of the commandant's offices of the occupiers is located here," he said.

He added: "The earth will burn under the occupiers. This unshakable truth is proven every day by our soldiers from the armed forces of Ukraine in the south of Ukraine."

Meanwhile, at least two people were killed in the latest shelling in the eastern Donetsk oblast. Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor, reported that Russian forces had attacked the already wrecked towns of Avdiivka and Zaitseve, close to territory held by Russian-controlled separatists.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Pharmacies to pay \$650M opioid crisis role
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/17/cvs-walgreens-walmart-opioids-crisis-ohio
GIST	<p>The US pharmacy chains CVS, Walmart and Walgreens must pay a combined \$650.6m to two Ohio counties to address the damage done by the opioid epidemic, a federal judge ruled on Wednesday.</p> <p>The order by US judge Dan Polster in Cleveland comes after a jury last November concluded that the firms helped create a public nuisance in Lake and Trumbull counties by oversupplying addictive pain pills, many of which found their way on to the black market. The companies have said they would appeal that verdict.</p> <p>Polster held a separate non-jury trial earlier this year to decide how much the companies had to pay.</p> <p>"We are disappointed with this outcome," a Walgreens spokesman, Fraser Engleman, said in a statement. "The facts and the law did not support the jury verdict last fall, and they do not support the court's decision now."</p> <p>CVS and Walmart did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Polster said the sum must be paid over 15 years, with the amount for the first two years, or \$86.7m, to be paid into a fund immediately. The judge also ordered the companies to implement new procedures to combat illegal diversion of opioid drugs.</p>

	<p>The US opioid epidemic has caused more than 500,000 overdose deaths over two decades, according to government data. More than 3,300 opioid lawsuits have been filed nationally against drugmakers, distributors and pharmacy chains.</p> <p>The litigation has resulted in several nationwide settlements, including a \$26bn deal with Johnson & Johnson and the three leading distributors, a \$2.37bn settlement with AbbVie Inc and a \$4.25bn settlement with Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.</p> <p>Pharmacies have yet to reach a nationwide settlement.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Forest fires northern Algeria kill 26
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/dozens-killed-and-injured-by-forest-fires-across-northern-algeria
GIST	<p>At least 26 people have died and dozens of others have been injured in forest fires that ravaged 14 districts of northern Algeria, the interior minister said on Wednesday.</p> <p>Kamel Beldjoud told state television that 24 people had been killed in fires in El Tarf, near the border with Tunisia, in addition to two others who died earlier in Setif.</p> <p>The civil protection agency in Setif said that two women, “a 58-year-old mother and her 31-year-old daughter”, were killed in the town.</p> <p>In Souk Ahras, farther to the east, people were seen fleeing their homes as fires spread before firefighting helicopters were deployed.</p> <p>An earlier toll said four people in Souk Ahras suffered burns and 41 others had breathing difficulties, the authorities said. Media reports said 350 residents had been evacuated.</p> <p>No updated toll was given on the number of people injured in the fires in other areas.</p> <p>The gendarmerie has closed several roads as a result of the fires.</p> <p>“Thirty-nine fires are under way in 14 wilayas (administrative councils),” the civil protection agency said, noting that El Tarf was the worst hit, with 16 fires in progress.</p> <p>Since the start of August, 106 fires have broken out in Algeria, destroying more than 2,500 hectares (6,200 acres) of woodland.</p> <p>Beldjoud said some of the fires were started by people.</p> <p>Wednesday’s toll brings the total number of people killed in wildfires this summer up to 30.</p> <p>Algeria is Africa’s largest country but it only has 4.1m hectares (10.1m acres) of forest.</p> <p>Each year the north of the country is affected by forest fires, a problem that has worsened because of the climate crisis.</p> <p>Last year, at least 90 people died in forest fires that ravaged northern Algeria, destroying more than 100,000 hectares of woodland.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 US, Taiwan set for trade, investment talks
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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-taiwan-to-begin-formal-talks-for-trade-investment-pact-this-fall-11660783393?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The U.S. announced Wednesday that it and Taiwan will start negotiations for a bilateral trade and investment initiative this fall to deepen ties on a range of issues including technology and agriculture.</p> <p>The new pact will also address ways to respond to “distortive practices of state-owned enterprises and nonmarket policies and practices,” the U.S. Trade Representative’s office said, in a clear reference to China’s policies without naming the country.</p> <p>Details of the bilateral initiative follow the initial announcement of the plan in June and come as tensions over Taiwan between the U.S. and China flare following a visit to the self-governed island by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August and a subsequent delegation led by Sen. Ed Markey (D., Mass.) last weekend.</p> <p>The congressional visits, designed to show support for Taiwan and democracy, have prompted harsh responses from Beijing, pushing the U.S. and China to their most strained relations in many years.</p> <p>The pact will “deepen our trade and investment relationship, advance mutual trade priorities based on shared values, and promote innovation and inclusive economic growth for our workers and businesses,” said Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Sarah Bianchi.</p> <p>“We plan to pursue an ambitious schedule for achieving high-standard commitments and meaningful outcomes covering the eleven trade areas in the negotiating mandate that will help build a fairer, more prosperous and resilient 21st century economy.”</p> <p>The Chinese Embassy in Washington didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment late Wednesday.</p> <p>China has opposed U.S. efforts to strengthen ties with Taiwan, saying the U.S. is moving away from its longstanding policy that recognizes the People’s Republic of China as the country’s only legitimate government.</p> <p>“China firmly opposes all forms of official interactions in any name or form between Taiwan and countries having diplomatic ties with China,” a Chinese Embassy spokesman said when the plans to strengthen U.S.-Taiwan economic ties were announced in June.</p> <p>The U.S. has insisted there is no change in its policy toward China and Taiwan, but China’s ambassador this week accused Washington of escalating tensions, including through the visits to the island by Mrs. Pelosi and other lawmakers.</p> <p>The bilateral negotiations will take place under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto U.S. Embassy in Taipei, and the Taipei Economic Cultural Representative Office in the U.S., Taiwan’s representative office in the U.S.</p> <p>Even as the U.S. has robust relations with Taiwan, it hasn’t had formal diplomatic relations with the island since 1979, the year the U.S. established a formal relationship with China, which sees Taiwan as part of its territory.</p> <p>The list of the areas to be covered by the new agreement, dubbed the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade, includes trade facilitation, regulatory practices, anticorruption standards, and enhancing trade between small and medium enterprises.</p> <p>The two sides will also discuss removing discriminatory trade barriers and imposing rigorous labor and environmental standards, as well as digital and agricultural trade matters.</p>

Separately, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in June that she was launching a dialogue with Taiwan to address technology trade and investments, along with supply chains and technology export controls.

The U.S.'s effort to strengthen trade ties with Taiwan comes as it moves to expand economic engagements in Asia-Pacific to counter China's influence.

During President Biden's visit to the region in May, the U.S. and more than a dozen countries formally launched negotiations to form a new platform called the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to deepen ties in trade, supply chain resilience, environmental policy and digital economy, as well as other areas.

Taiwan had expressed interest in joining the broad pact, known as IPEF, but it wasn't included.

Economic officials from IPEF countries are expected to meet in the U.S. in September.

The negotiating mandate for the bilateral initiative released Wednesday outlines the topics to be discussed under the 11 areas.

The discussions on state-owned enterprises will address "significant distortions" in trade and investment caused by the practices of state-owned and state-controlled enterprises and government designated monopolies, through the adoption of provisions to create a level playing field for workers and businesses when competing against these entities internationally.

On the nonmarket policies and practices, the two sides will seek to promote cooperation to address harmful practices.

"The United States and Taiwan are market-oriented economies and understand the harm that can be caused by trade partners that deploy nonmarket policies and practices, which threaten livelihoods and can harm workers and businesses," according to the mandate.

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HEADLINE	08/17 US veterans training Ukrainians as Marines
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-ukraine-war-american-veterans-volunteers-training-11660743714?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>MYKOLAIV, Ukraine—Clad in mismatched fatigues, Ukrainian Marine recruits sprawled on the grass, cocking their assault rifles and aiming at targets. Then, to the surprise of their American instructors, one by one they started squeezing the trigger.</p> <p>"Cease fire!" yelled Steven Tomberlin, 62, a retired police officer from Colorado overseeing this part of the training. "Until I give the command. You. Do. Not. Do. Anything." When the firing resumed, bullets hit the dirt berm, often far off the mark.</p> <p>"Most of these people have just been mobilized. They were electricians or tractor drivers yesterday, and many have never held a weapon in their hands," said Sr. Lt. Anton Solohub, a deputy commander of this Ukrainian Marine battalion, as he watched the first day of a crash course provided by a group of mostly American veterans.</p> <p>"These instructors have promised that they will turn my men into some kind of special force in 10 days," Lt. Solohub mused. "Let's see."</p> <p>Europe's bloodiest war since 1945 has chewed through tens of thousands of troops on both sides, annihilating entire brigades. While Ukraine has mobilized several hundred thousand men to replenish the ranks, the biggest problem it faces today is how to train these erstwhile civilians for the brutal combat against a better-armed and more numerous foe—especially as Kyiv seeks to regain occupied land.</p>

Ukraine's military suffers from a severe shortage of qualified trainers, because experienced combat troops are needed on the front lines. The active-duty soldiers from the U.K., U.S. and Canada who used to conduct training missions here were pulled out in February, and a new training program on British soil can take up only some of the slack.

That's where volunteers like Mr. Tomberlin, who used to train Afghan commandos, come in.

The trainers are among the thousands of Westerners who flocked to Ukraine after President Volodymyr Zelensky announced in the first days of the war that the country would welcome anyone willing to fight for its independence. Many joined the new International Legion, which has since suffered significant casualties in combat. Several of these Western fighters have been captured by Russia and several others killed.

Older, more experienced volunteers like Mr. Tomberlin felt that they would be far more useful imparting their knowledge to Ukrainian recruits than sitting in a trench—an assessment shared by senior Ukrainian commanders. “Here, there is such a hunger for what we are offering,” said Mr. Tomberlin, who has already trained some 270 Ukrainian troops. “These guys will be better prepared than 75% of the Ukrainian army.”

The unit Mr. Tomberlin joined calls itself the Mobile Assault Training Group, or MATG. It includes around a dozen Americans, plus a few Britons, Canadians and Israelis, assisted by Ukrainian translators and support staff.

The group's members flew to Ukraine on their own dime, drawn by televised images of destruction, and banded together through informal connections here in Mykolaiv, a southern Ukrainian city that the Russian military failed to capture in March. Mykolaiv remains a dangerous place, subject to daily shelling and rocket barrages.

While the U.S. government advises all American citizens to leave Ukraine, it doesn't impose penalties on those who travel here to help the Ukrainian military.

“I've had a lot of Ukrainian soldiers tell me that this is the most meaningful thing they have done in their lives, and I tell them the same,” said one of the MATG trainers, Brian Bentley, 29, a former U.S. Marine who was planning to take a police academy course in Detroit but decided to come to Ukraine instead.

For Russia, these trainers represent a priority target. MATG's leader, Bradley Crawford, who retired from the U.S. Army infantry as a sergeant first class, says his details were found in the phone of a Russian hit-squad member recently captured in Mykolaiv. A Russian missile hit near the house where he was staying last month, causing him some burns and other minor injuries.

“The Russians, they sure don't like us being here,” said the 39-year-old Mr. Crawford, an Iraq war veteran from Ohio who has been here since April and who wears a uniform with Ukrainian and American flag patches.

The fierce nature of the war turns his Ukrainian students into quick learners, he adds. “They have no choice and time is not on their side,” said Mr. Crawford. “In Afghanistan and Iraq, we did have dangers, but here we are sending these guys to full kinetic warfare, not some kind of counterinsurgency.”

Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade, to which the recruits here belong, was deployed in the Azov Sea city of Mariupol when the war began, and was quickly encircled. It has essentially ceased to exist, with roughly a thousand Marines killed, wounded or captured, according to officials in Kyiv, after months of some of the most intense urban combat in recent military history. Created anew, this battalion of several hundred troops and the rest of the 36th brigade are training for a new mission: to reclaim the nearby city of Kherson, the only Ukrainian regional capital that Russia managed to seize since the Feb. 24 invasion.

The new battalion commander, Capt. Oleksandr Buntov, and many of his men are originally from Kherson. The captain has managed to smuggle out his family, but some other Marines still have spouses, children or parents living under Russian occupation.

“My motivation is ironclad: to liberate my home,” Capt. Buntov said. “I know it will be hard, and this is why we are getting prepared—and why we need these instructors to teach here. Urban close-quarters combat is the hardest kind of combat, no matter how long you train, and offense is much harder than defense.”

Capt. Buntov and the battalion’s other senior leaders are battle-hardened officers, but most of their junior commanders are as fresh to the military as the bulk of the recruits. On a recent day, retired U.S. Army Capt. Jim Lee schooled some of the unit’s lieutenants in how to plan an urban mission in a city like Kherson, with printouts of maps and assault plans.

“We are starting with the fundamentals here,” said Mr. Lee, who was studying for a master’s degree in Poland and got involved in efforts to help Ukrainian refugees when the war began.

One of the newly baked platoon leaders, Lt. Vitaly, who like most Ukrainian soldiers isn’t allowed to disclose his full name, is a 42-year-old prosecutor who, back in college, enrolled in Ukraine’s equivalent of ROTC. He went through a 40-day Ukrainian officer training course after the war began. “I am learning the military science from scratch. Everything is new,” he admitted, taking a cigarette break from Mr. Lee’s instruction. “The Russian plan is to push ahead without care for casualties. In our army, the main value is the life and health of a soldier. That is why we need to learn how to outsmart the enemy.”

An important part of the training is to teach American infantry tactics to surprise and befuddle the Russians, who expect the Ukrainians to follow the same Soviet doctrine as they do, American instructors say.

In a typical course here in the countryside near Mykolaiv, the foreign instructors train two separate 32-man platoons, pitting them against each other in a final exercise. The first platoon’s leader, Lt. Maksym, 38, was an accountant in the Ukrainian-controlled Donbas until June. “I am not a military man, actually quite far from it, and I had hoped it wouldn’t come to this,” he said as he furrowed his brows, trying to absorb the trainers’ instructions.

The other leader, Lt. Ihor, 32, a broad-shouldered Odessa merchant marine engineer with a shaved head, seemed more comfortable in his new role. “It’s not that different from the ship. It’s hot, there’s close quarters, you work all the time and there is no time for rest,” he joked. Neither man had seen battle.

By day four of the training, the Marines in the two platoons had learned how to handle their weapons and administer first aid. Now they were on to more complicated tasks. Lt. Maksym’s men plucked branches and leaves from nearby fields, with one of them constructing an impressive wreath of flowers on his head, and concealed themselves in the bushes to practice an ambush on their instructors. One of the trainers, American-born former Israeli paratrooper Taylor Bridges, dutifully fell on the ground once the Ukrainian Marines shouted “pam, pam, pam” to imitate gunfire. He winced as the men turned him over and searched his body for documents and weapons.

On the walk back, tensions within the platoon appeared. Mitya, a veteran Marine who wore a Soviet-style blue-and-white striped shirt and refused to don a helmet, came up to Mr. Crawford to complain about being bossed around by a newbie lieutenant. Most of Mitya’s comrades died in combat on the Mykolaiv front in the past five months, he said, and he had been sent to the battalion after falling out with his previous commander. “All these people giving me orders, where have they been all this time?” he said. Mr. Crawford listened politely.

Lt. Ihor's platoon, meanwhile, practiced operations to seize a building—in this case the battalion's temporary headquarters in a village in the Mykolaiv region. Fearful of the Russian missiles that often strike such facilities, many Marines pitched tents under trees nearby, refusing to overnight in the building.

The Marines picked an avenue of approach and raced up the staircase, with the last man of the team swinging his rifle to protect the rear. At lunch afterward, the lieutenant was happy. "These are guys who have never held weapons in their hands, and by now they've learned how to clear buildings," he said. The battalion commander, Capt. Buntov, was also satisfied. "Sweat now spares blood later," he said.

For the final exercise on day 10, the two platoons gathered in a forest of pines and wild acacia trees, and set up two field headquarters at opposite ends of the area. One platoon wore green armbands, another blue, and the instructors yellow. The mission of Lt. Maksym's platoon was to prepare an ambush along the dirt road fringed by the forest on one side and a field of chest-high sunflowers on the other. Since not every trooper had been issued a helmet, the two teams agreed not to wear them, to maintain fair play.

"The nature of the war here is that the enemy will have superior firepower and as many or more men than you, but you will nevertheless be tasked to attack them," Mr. Tomberlin prepped the men.

Unwilling to wait for his lieutenant's instructions, Mitya rapidly climbed a tree and announced he would be on the lookout for the enemy. "Macaw, there are no bananas up that tree," another Marine jeered. "Come down, monkey." Once Lt. Maksym finally set up an ambush, the first two members of the enemy patrol—including Lt. Ihor—were quickly eliminated. It was a major success.

Still, Lt. Maksym didn't move or give orders. "Lieutenant, you've killed two of their men, what next?" an impatient Mr. Crawford urged him. An interpreter mistranslated it as the other platoon killing two of Lt. Maksym's scouts.

"Well, I guess that's it, we've lost," he sighed resigned. As Lt. Maksym vacillated, the remainder of the other platoon rallied its forces and counterattacked. "This lieutenant's indecision has just cost the lives of an entire squad," Mr. Crawford muttered.

When the roles changed, Lt. Ihor asked Mr. Tomberlin how creative his men could be. One of his Marines, a bare-chested native of Kherson who had smuggled himself from Russian-occupied territories so that he could join the Ukrainian military, proposed using dummies with uniforms, helmets and a couple of guns to distract the enemy's attention—while hiding the actual ambush inside the sunflower field. "That's a great idea," Mr. Tomberlin nodded. As they walked through bushes to pick the perfect ambush site, a couple of other Marines, both named Vova, seemed more interested in examining the maturing sunflower pods, picking out and tasting the seeds.

"It's going to be a great harvest this year," one of them said. Both men had come from the countryside of Ukraine's central Khmelnytskyi region. "Only the farm boys get drafted. Have you seen anyone from the big cities here," the younger Vova complained. So far, the highlights of his military career consisted of surviving a Russian missile attack on his barracks near Lviv in western Ukraine, and another on his barracks in Mykolaiv. "We're farmers, we're not really warriors," he said.

Noticing the disturbed sunflower pods, Mr. Tomberlin didn't hide his anger. "What is this, who has done this? Something like this will give away your position."

All throughout the day, distant thuds of Russian shelling could be heard from Mykolaiv. Then, at dusk, one of the instructors yelled into the radio that he could see two rockets heading in his direction. "Switch off your phones, turn off your lights," Mr. Tomberlin shouted. A concentration of cellphones could be spotted by Russian electronic warfare systems and used for targeting. A Ukrainian air defense battery several miles away fired off three missiles that blasted into the starry sky.

	<p>Lt. Ihor had planned a complex maneuver with three sections that were meant to communicate by phone messages. Without the phones, he had to revise the plan. The entire platoon set off on a long hike through the fields, aiming to seize Lt. Maksym's headquarters from an unexpected direction.</p> <p>In the darkness, American instructors strained their eyes, warily scanning the sky for potential Russian drones. "There is this one, it's definitely moving and shaking from the wind," said one. "No, no, I think it's a satellite," said another.</p> <p>Then, they noticed a bright light just above the tree line. "It's definitely not a star. I can see it moving toward us, slowly," one said. Five minutes later, it wasn't clear whether it had moved. Capt. Lee switched on his smartphone and pointed at the unidentified celestial object with an app.</p> <p>"It's Saturn!" he exclaimed.</p> <p>Shortly after midnight, Lt. Ihor's platoon maneuvered around a strip of forest and sneaked up on the base of the rival platoon from the rear. Even from the distance of a few dozen yards, his men could be spotted only with night-vision goggles.</p> <p>"Bang bang bang," the Marines shouted as they threw imaginary grenades into their rivals' command post. "You're dead, you're dead, and you're dead too," Mr. Tomberlin told the surprised victims.</p> <p>"They've done pretty well, huh," he said, clicking his tongue as the Ukrainian Marines turned in for the night in the forest. While the tactics could be improved, he added, the men now formed an actual fighting unit.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Iran renews demands for US guarantees
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-renews-demands-for-u-s-guarantees-in-nuclear-deal-talks-11660763334?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>BERLIN—Iranian demands for guarantees from the U.S. have once again stalled efforts to revive a 2015 nuclear pact, leaving Washington and European capitals unsure if a deal is possible.</p> <p>Tehran on Monday sent a response to the European Union, which chairs the nuclear talks, neither accepting nor rejecting an EU draft text of a deal but raising several issues Iran wanted incorporated into the agreement. The EU had said its draft was the "final text" of a possible deal when it sent it out, announcing that negotiations were over.</p> <p>Central to Iran's response, the Iranian negotiating team has said, are assurances it seeks that Western companies investing in Iran would be protected if the U.S. withdrew from the pact again as it did under former President Donald Trump. Iran has also floated mechanisms in the agreement that would allow Tehran to quickly increase its nuclear work if Washington quit the deal.</p> <p>"What is important for Iran is that there are assurances that if the United States suddenly leaves the deal again...it comes at a price," an adviser to Iran's negotiating team, Seyed Mohammad Marandi, told the British Broadcasting Corp. on Tuesday.</p> <p>European officials have said since Iran sent its response on Monday evening that the Iranian position could be the basis of some compromise, but an agreement depended on Tehran being flexible.</p> <p>A senior European official said Wednesday that Tehran and Washington need to give a yes or no on the draft text, dismissing the idea of reconvening talks between the parties. Two Western officials said they didn't expect any announcement of a deal imminently, although it remains possible in the coming days.</p>

The issue of guarantees has come up repeatedly during the 16 months of negotiations between Iran, the U.S. and the other parties to try to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, which lifted most international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for tight but temporary restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.

The talks, mainly in Vienna, are seeking to agree the steps that both Iran and the U.S. would take to return into compliance with the nuclear deal. After the U.S. quit the deal in 2018, Iran has greatly expanded its nuclear activities.

Early in the negotiations, Iran was seeking promises from the U.S. that they would never leave the deal again, as long as Tehran was in compliance, a demand U.S. officials said was impossible to meet because of the inability of the Biden administration to control decisions made by future presidents.

Iran appeared this spring to accept U.S. assurances that the Biden administration would stick by the agreement as long as it was in office and Iran was in compliance with the deal. The negotiators also crafted significant wind-down periods for Western firms to wrap up their business in Iran if Washington did leave the pact and reimpose U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Now, Iran appears to be reopening those ideas.

In Iran over the past couple of days, a series of meetings have taken place between the head of the negotiating team and senior officials in the government, parliament and Iran's national security council. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ultimately has the final say on all major national security issues.

Iran's response to the EU draft text has drawn mixed responses among the other parties to the deal, which include Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany, as well as the U.S. and Iran.

Russian chief negotiator Mikhail Ulyanov, who has worked closely with the Iranian negotiating team, said on Twitter there was a "great chance to cross the finish line," saying the decision now lay in Washington.

"The final result depends on how the U.S. react to the last Iranian reasonable suggestions," he said.

State Department spokesman Ned Price declined to comment on the details of the negotiations on Wednesday, saying, "We're making our views known privately and directly to the EU."

One option is for the U.S. response to Iran to be the basis for an altered EU draft text that could be sent to the parties for approval. Another would be for ideas to continue to be exchanged between capitals with no strict deadline for ending the talks.

While both Iranian and U.S. officials have said the negotiations can't be open ended, there are advantages for both sides in not declaring an agreement dead, even as Iran's nuclear program advances.

The U.S. is eager to avoid a fresh crisis amid the war in Ukraine and ahead of midterm elections. Iranian officials have set lifting the U.S. sanctions as one of their top goals amid difficult economic conditions.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Forecast: La Nina winter after hot summer
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/forecast-calls-la-nina-winter-after-hot-dry-summer/76CZZJDVZJAA5FZCRJ2S43Z2X4/
GIST	<p>Following one of the hottest summers on record comes the expectation that winter will be extra cold, and extra dark.</p> <p>This week, meteorologists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirmed that La Nina will be back for the third winter in a row.</p>

	<p>As a result, this winter could be as wet and cold as last year, when historic flooding hit many areas of western Washington, costing tens of millions of dollars in damage.</p> <p>“They started keeping track of this statistic around 1950, and we’ve only had two three-in-a-row events,” said Dana Felton with the National Weather Service.</p> <p>At Green Lake, news of the upcoming change caused people to enjoy the sunny summer conditions even more.</p> <p>“I love them. I wouldn’t trade this for any other place in the country, period,” said one person whom KIRO 7 spoke with on Wednesday.</p> <p>But not everyone is sticking around for the switch. One person is in Seattle for an internship that ends in a few weeks.</p> <p>“Part of me is definitely glad that I’m leaving, but I wouldn’t know how to deal with it because I’m from LA,” they said.</p> <p>Temperatures got down to the teens last winter, and despite the sunny conditions we’re seeing now, forecasters say that could happen again in just a few months.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Snohomish Co. to buy motels for homeless
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/snohomish-county-council-oks-plan-to-transform-2-motels-into-housing-for-the-homeless
GIST	<p>EDMONDS, Wash. — The Snohomish County Council has voted 3-2 to purchase two hotels and transform them into bridge housing for the unsheltered.</p> <p>The decision means county officials can move forward with plans to purchase Americas Best Value Inn Suites in Edmonds and a Days Inn in Everett.</p> <p>“The council and county feel this is the best option for curbing homeless for addressing homelessness (because) it’s something that’s proven to work,” said Megan Dunn, Snohomish County Council member. “It’s something we’ve studied for several years.”</p> <p>Several businesses near the America’s Best Value Inn said they supported the plan but there were some who do not.</p> <p>“I’m not happy with this decision,” said Nina Alibhai, owner of Factory Direct Tire Pros. “I’m uncomfortable about it.”</p> <p>The business owned by Alibhai and her husband, Nash, is located down the street from one of the motels that will be used. She said the location is not the best place for a shelter.</p> <p>“I think they should put them in an area that’s away from cities,” Nina Alibhai said.</p> <p>The couple said in the last few years homelessness has been on the rise, prompting concerns about safety.</p> <p>“We are scared to be here after dark, so that’s not a good feeling,” Nash Alibhai said. “We have people crashing out here at night.”</p> <p>But County Council member Megan Dunn said safety will be addressed.</p> <p>“By taking over the entire hotel we have 24-hour staffing (so) we know who goes in and out,” she said. “There’s a code of conduct that required to stay there.”</p>

	Which is why Nash on the other hand is open to the county's plan.
	"If it's in a controlled environment," Nash Alibhai said. "I don't see why not."
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HEADLINE	08/17 Firefighters prepare for brush fire threats
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fire-fighters-prepare-for-increased-threat-of-brush-fires-as-excessive-heat-lingers-on
GIST	<p>LAKEWOOD, Wash. - With this summer's excessively hot temperatures comes the growing threat of fires sparking almost anywhere.</p> <p>Crews with West Pierce Fire & Rescue said some areas of focus during brush fire season are train tracks that often have dry, overgrown brush surrounding them. The risk is heightened in those areas when the weather is not only hot, but also windy.</p> <p>"Today is one of those days. We all said it this morning—it feels like a day that's probably going to burn," said Captain Jason Tinsley with West Pierce Fire and Rescue.</p> <p>Tinsley said firefighters are responding to a lot more brush fires this year. Crews just battled large flames in a wooded area in Lakewood on Monday. Tinsley explained the abundance of greenery from the spring dried out from the extremely hot summer, which is now fueling the risk for more fires.</p> <p>"It certainly alerts us. It kind of brings us to another level of 'Hey, we got to be prepared for this, and we need to understand the weather that's going on today,'" said Tinsley.</p> <p>The captain of Engine 20 said checking the weather is how he starts each day, focusing his attention on the relative humidity.</p> <p>"Anytime you see this relative humidity dip below 40 percent you have real potential for easy fire starts in brush," said Tinsley. "We will absolutely sit down as a crew, and we look at wind direction, wind speed, humidity, dew point. We want to know all of this stuff because it effects the fire weather."</p> <p>Western Washington is inching closer to an all-time record for the most 90-degree days in a year. The record was set in 2015, when there were 12 days in the 90s. So far in 2022, there are 10 and there are still more extremely hot days ahead.</p> <p>This raises concern and threat.</p> <p>While brush fire season might last longer this year, crews are staying cool, and not just by hydrating. They have an extra measure of confidence thanks to some extra training.</p> <p>"Our organization went out and got a grant for us to have specific wildland urban interface fire training this year. So, we will all have that training, and it's going to make us better prepared for this year and years to come," said Tinsley.</p> <p>As brush fires become more common in the area, firefighters are asking members of the public to do their part in reducing the risk. This includes making sure there are no chains dragging from cars that could spark, and fully putting out cigarettes and other smoking materials before throwing it away.</p> <p>"It's probably out of sight, out of mind—people throw it out their window or throw it on the ground, and they don't think about the potential effect from that. That is burning material. You get a low humidity day like today, and it doesn't take much to start a fire," said Tinsley.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Lakewood: hazardous materials response
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article264627396.html
GIST	<p>A hyper-pressurized Lakewood Industrial Park chemical bin prompted nearby people to shelter away from a potential explosion Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>In a phone call with the newspaper, West Pierce Fire & Rescue assistant chief Hallie McCurdy said the bin, located in the Aero Precision warehouse parking lot in the 4800 block of 100th Street Southwest, could send projectiles as far as 1,000 feet from the source. As of 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, the bin was still at risk of exploding, and firefighters were still monitoring the situation.</p> <p>West Pierce has asked people to stay away from the area, including the Lakewood YMCA adjacent to the parking lot, until the bin is no longer pressurized. People in the parking lot Wednesday afternoon were asked to shelter in place, and patrons inside the building were exited through the back. The fire department has asked the Lakewood community avoid going to this gym Wednesday evening.</p> <p>According to McCurdy, an Aero Precision employee first called the department about the bin at 2:50 p.m. The caller reported that a drum of mineral oil was heating up after an employee disposed aluminum in it. The aluminum was discarded properly, and firefighters do not know what is causing the reaction yet.</p> <p>Since shortly after the call, firefighters on the scene have been trying to mitigate potential damage. That includes shutting off traffic to the access road behind a Lowe's Home Improvement. McCurdy said that no other streets have been blocked off; first responders will stay in the area until the bin is no longer at risk of exploding.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Fed officials: inflation uncomfortably high
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/business/federal-reserve-minutes.html
GIST	<p>Federal Reserve officials viewed their efforts to tame inflation as beginning to have an effect, according to the minutes of their meeting in July, but they also remained committed to further raising interest rates as prices stay too high for comfort.</p> <p>Fed policymakers in recent months have become increasingly aggressive in their efforts to curb inflation, which this spring hit a four-decade high. In June, the central bank raised its benchmark interest rate three-quarters of a percentage point, the largest increase since 1994. They followed that up with another, equally large rate increase last month.</p> <p>It is a near certainty that the Fed will raise rates again when central bank officials next meet Sept. 20-21. The question is by how much. Another three-quarter-point increase would be a strong indication that policymakers are determined not to relax their efforts until they see clear evidence that inflation has slowed. A half-point increase, though still large by historical standards, would suggest that the Fed believes it can ease up, if only slightly.</p> <p>"Further rate hikes are clearly in the cards," said Michael Gapen, chief U.S. economist for Bank of America. Another strong jobs report, he said, could lead to another three-quarter-point increase. But if that doesn't happen, a smaller increase is more likely.</p> <p>"More uncertainty means you should move at a more cautious pace," he said.</p> <p>Minutes from the Fed's July meeting, which were released Wednesday, suggest the decision will depend on economic data released in the coming weeks, including reports on inflation and jobs.</p> <p>"Participants concurred that the pace of policy rate increases and the extent of future policy tightening would depend on the implications of incoming information for the economic outlook and risks to the outlook," the minutes said.</p>

But as of their July meeting, policymakers continued to express concern about rapid price increases.

“Participants agreed that there was little evidence to date that inflation pressures were subsiding,” according to the minutes. “They judged that inflation would respond to monetary policy tightening and the associated moderation in economic activity with a delay and would likely stay uncomfortably high for some time.”

As a result, Fed officials said they remained committed to moving to a “restrictive stance of policy” — meaning raising rates high enough that they meaningfully slow the economy.

In a news conference after its July meeting, Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, characterized the three-quarter-point increases as “unusually large” and said the decision on whether to continue them would depend on incoming economic data. That led some investors to conclude that policymakers were likely to ease the pace of rate increases, especially after the government reported that [inflation had slowed](#) more than expected in July.

But in speeches and interviews after the meeting, Fed officials pushed back against the idea of a Fed “pivot” on inflation. In an [interview with The New York Times](#) this month, Neel Kashkari, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, said that he was surprised by markets’ interpretation and that policymakers were still “a long way away” from winning their fight against inflation.

The central bank often uses the minutes of past meetings to communicate its thinking, and investors on Wednesday were watching closely for signals of how the Fed might act. But policymakers provided few clear clues. They said it would be appropriate to slow the rate of rate increases “at some point,” but gave no indication as to when.

Seth Carpenter, chief economist at Morgan Stanley, said the minutes were “pretty two-handed,” neither committing to another supsize rate increase nor ruling one out.

Mr. Powell will have another chance next week to make his thinking clear when he gives a speech at the Fed’s annual symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyo.

When consumer prices began rising rapidly last year, Mr. Powell and his colleagues initially dismissed the phenomenon as “transitory,” the effect of the reopening of the economy as the pandemic restrictions eased. Instead, prices continued to rise as demand remained strong and supplies of both workers and goods struggled to keep up.

Late last year, policymakers indicated they no longer viewed inflation as transitory and would begin moving to bring it to heel. The Fed has been raising interest rates since last spring in the hopes that by making borrowing more expensive for both consumers and businesses, it can bring down demand and ease pressure on prices.

In the minutes of their July meeting, Fed officials said there was some evidence their actions were “starting to affect the economy, most visibly in interest-sensitive sectors,” even before the full impact of their policies has been felt. Still, the Fed is likely to need to see more than one or two comforting reports before it begins to change course, said Sarah House, a senior economist at Wells Fargo.

“It’s not enough that there are signs of inflation pressures easing,” she said. “They really need to actually see it in the data.”

The data released since the July meeting has sent conflicting signals. Consumer prices were roughly flat in July, and the year-on-year pace of inflation cooled. The housing market has slowed sharply, suggesting that higher borrowing costs are beginning to take a toll.

On the other hand, hiring and wage growth remained strong in July, and consumers continue to spend, trends that, if they continue, could keep upward pressure on prices.

	<p>“The last thing they would want to do is to declare a premature victory,” said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist of Pantheon Macroeconomics, a forecasting firm. “They were badly scarred by the transitory debacle, and they won’t get caught again.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Russia missile strike residential building
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/17/world/ukraine-russia-news-war#a-missile-strike-on-a-residential-building-in-kharkiv-kills-at-least-6-people
GIST	<p>As firefighters raced to pull people from the rubble and flames lit up the night sky, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine denounced a Russian missile strike on a residential neighborhood in Kharkiv on Wednesday night as a “vile and cynical attack on civilians.”</p> <p>The dead were still being pulled from the rubble, he said, but the strike was the latest evidence that Russia, struggling on the battlefield in the east and south of the country, was terrorizing civilians to advance its ultimate goal of destroying the Ukrainian state.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said at least six civilians were killed and another 16 wounded, warning that the number was likely to rise.</p> <p>The strike comes as Russia has not made any major territorial advances since early July, when it captured the city of Lysychansk, securing the Luhansk region in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have been using long-range Western weapons to try to degrade Russian combat capability, attacking deep beyond the front lines to hit command and control centers, ammunition depots and vital supply routes.</p> <p>Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second largest city, has been bombarded by a nearly constant stream of incoming artillery, rockets and missiles over the past six months. Early in the war, Russian forces tried to surround and capture the city, but failed and were eventually forced back by Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>Still, Ukrainian and Western military analysts say, the Kremlin has never given up on its goal of capturing the city, which is 25 miles from the Russian border.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Russian rockets hit five of the city’s nine districts. On Wednesday, a Russian rocket hit a dormitory in a residential neighborhood.</p> <p>“When you hear about Kharkiv’s pain, it hurts again,” Mr. Zelensky said in a statement on his Telegram channel, posting a video of the aftermath of the strike.</p> <p>Earlier in the day, the city’s mayor, Ihor Terekhov, said that the city’s ability to function despite the Russian attacks was one reason that Moscow continued to try to bring its residents to their knees. The attacks had picked up in recent days, in what the mayor said was a sign of Russian frustration over the city’s unwillingness to bend.</p> <p>“Today, Russian troops shell Kharkiv with such hatred, with such aggressiveness, such cynical destruction of the city occurs because Kharkiv does not give up, Kharkiv is a Ukrainian city that continues to live,” he said. “They purposefully destroy the infrastructure to make Kharkiv residents freeze during the heating season. Our task is to withstand.”</p> <p>Russia has also continued to bombard the port city of Mykolaiv on Ukraine’s southern coast. The city — a key staging ground for Ukrainian forces as they seek to cut off thousands of Russian soldiers west of the Dnipro River — has been under relentless fire.</p> <p>Ukraine’s southern command said on Wednesday that Russian attack aircraft and helicopters had hit Ukrainian positions nine times overnight and destroyed vital port infrastructure.</p>

	<p>Oleksandr Senkevych, the mayor of Mykolaiv, said the Russians had also hit a local university.</p> <p>“Just a few days ago I posted a video showing that there is no military base there,” he said in a message posted on social media. “That ordinary specialists of the university work there: They accept applicants’ documents, sign circular letters, issue diplomas.”</p> <p>In the nearby city of Odesa, missile strikes hit a recreation center and destroyed several homes, Serhii Bratchuk, the spokesman of the Odesa regional military administration, said in a Telegram post. Three people were injured, he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Europe unequal access monkeypox shots
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/world/europe/monkeypox-vaccine-inequality-europe.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Flavio Stupino, a bank worker in Milan, had taken the same train many times before — for a vacation, to visit a friend or a lover on the French Côte d’Azur. This time, though, he was crossing the border with a different aim: to get a monkeypox vaccine.</p> <p>For nearly two months, he had anxiously scrutinized his skin for any sign of infection. He had stopped visiting gay clubs and saunas, and refrained from casual sexual encounters. Then Mr. Stupino heard that France was offering vaccinations, while Italy still didn’t.</p> <p>“I had to run for cover,” he said.</p> <p>In Europe, the global monkeypox hot spot, the latest outbreak has disturbing echoes of the last one, when stocks of protective gear, coronavirus tests and Covid-19 vaccine were, at first, inadequate, hampered by production bottlenecks, and distributed at uneven speeds.</p> <p>Once again, some nations are much better equipped than others. And despite a strengthened mechanism for common purchases, they are now competing against one another and against the European Union for limited vaccine supplies, and “vaccine tourism” — crossing borders in search of shots — has returned.</p> <p>Until the delivery last week of about 7,000 doses supplied by Brussels, Spain, the epicenter of the European monkeypox outbreak, had access to only about 5,000, leaving many vulnerable people still waiting. France, with fewer than half as many confirmed cases, had already vaccinated 27,000 people.</p> <p>The European Union set out to prevent a repeat of the Covid debacle, and last year created a new health emergency agency that was supposed to act decisively and put all 27 member countries on an equal footing. But experts say the new agency does not have the full powers envisioned for it, in part because individual countries have been unwilling to cede authority in the politically sensitive area of public health.</p> <p>In 2020, while Covid vaccines were still in development, the pandemic was already an enormous health and economic crisis, and it was clear that Europe would need billions of doses. Yet the European Commission, the E.U. executive branch, was slower than United States or Britain to buy and distribute vaccines, drawing bitter criticism.</p> <p>When monkeypox first began to spread in Europe in May, the situation was, in many ways, very different: There was no prospect of a wave of fatalities, the disease was not widespread, the containment strategy called for inoculating only certain at-risk people, and vaccines already existed.</p> <p>Determined not to repeat Covid missteps, the new European agency ordered 110,000 vaccine doses with E.U. funds in early June. At that point, only 299 cases had been reported in the European Union, officials said, and the commission said in a statement that the purchase was sufficient “to cover the most immediate, short-term needs of member states.”</p>

It wasn't. National health authorities had underestimated how fast the virus would spread, particularly among men who have sex with men. More than 30,000 people have been infected worldwide, and millions are considered at risk.

In addition, only one vaccine is approved in Europe for monkeypox prevention, manufactured by one fairly small pharmaceutical company, Bavarian Nordic, which faces production limitations and has competing orders. About 58,000 doses of the initial E.U. order two months ago have so far been delivered, with the rest expected by the end of August.

Vaccines for smallpox, once a leading killer, are also effective against monkeypox, and inoculation was near universal until the 1970s. But routine vaccination stopped when smallpox was eradicated, and older types of vaccine carry some risks that regulators consider acceptable only when trying to prevent a disease as deadly as smallpox.

European regulators have only approved Bavarian Nordic's shot — known as Imvanex in Europe, Imvamune in Canada and Jynneos in the United States — as safe enough for monkeypox prevention; two doses are required to be fully vaccinated. That "third generation" vaccine is [also approved in the United States](#), where regulators also recently gave permission to use a second-generation smallpox shot, ACAM2000, for monkeypox.

Individual countries and the World Health Organization have kept stores of smallpox vaccines in case the disease ever returns, but they vary enormously. Some national stockpiles are large enough to vaccinate every resident, while others are far short of that.

Some countries, like the Netherlands, France and the United States, had significant supplies of Bavarian Nordic's vaccine in their stores before monkeypox struck. Others, like Italy and Spain, did not.

Within weeks of the initial E.U. order, it became clear that it wasn't enough, and Brussels increased its purchase to 160,000 doses, the maximum under its emergency procedure — which was still inadequate. As cases mounted, the new European agency entered negotiations — still underway — for a new contract, but by then it was competing with many countries, including E.U. members, trying to buy on their own.

The vaccine produced by Bavarian Nordic "is the only one available on the market, is produced by only one company, with limited manufacturing capacity and pre-existing contractual obligations," the commission said in a statement.

"This is an illustration of the problem with health policy at the E.U. level," said Elizabeth Kuiper, associate director of the Brussels-based European Policy Centre.

"In a crisis, a lot of promises are made," she added, but then countries reverted to their tendency to look out for themselves, rather than share power and resources.

Spain has reported more than 5,000 monkeypox cases, by far the most in Europe, and has depended almost entirely on the E.U. mechanism for vaccines, receiving about 15,000 doses so far.

Nahum Cabrera, the H.I.V. coordinator for Spain's federation of L.G.B.T. associations, said that available vaccination spots were always filled in a matter of minutes, and the vast majority of the most vulnerable communities had been left out.

"We are relying on Europe and this worries us," he said. "Because Europe is going very slowly."

The German government ordered 240,000 doses directly from Bavarian Nordic — more than the European Commission has for the continent — of which 40,000 have been delivered. In addition, it has received 5,300 through the commission. Belgium ordered 30,000 doses on its own, but so far has received only 3,040 doses from the E.U. order.

The French Health Ministry said it had both dipped into its vaccine stockpile and made a direct order from Bavarian Nordic, which it declined to describe in detail. Dr. Giovanni Rezza, who is in charge of prevention at Italy's Health Ministry, said his country had been in talks with the company, but with no conclusion so far.

Jean-Michel Dogné, a professor at the University of Namur in Belgium and adviser to the European Medicines Agency and the World Health Organization, said that direct deals might be useful for countries that were hit hardest, but that they carried risks.

"There is no merit in having competition in between member states at the E.U. level," he said. "The first aim is really to work together to avoid this."

Anniek de Ruijter, a professor of health law and policy at the University of Amsterdam, said that using the E.U. budget to purchase vaccines and distribute them across the bloc was a groundbreaking move.

"It's a big step," she said. "For the longest time, there was no solidarity in the area of health in the E.U."

But that solidarity was partial and fragile, she added, with national authorities resistant to relinquishing control.

"Health is such a sensitive issue," she said. "It's something that can win you elections."

With limited doses in hand, Belgium has restricted vaccination to those identified as most vulnerable, leaving many gay men unable to get the shot yet. Community organizations have stepped into the vacuum, sharing guidance and contacts, and even organizing car shares to France, where shots are available.

Camilo Serrano, a 30-year-old Colombian who works as a French teacher in Brussels, initially tried to get the vaccine in Belgium, but was told that he was not eligible. Then he learned that a clinic in Lille, a French city just across the border, was hosting an open day for vaccinations without an appointment. Mr. Serrano rushed to book a train ticket.

He said he feared the pain caused by the disease. "But there is also the stigma," he added. "If you get it, how do you explain it to your boss? It does not necessarily mean that you are having sex with everyone."

One Saturday this month, over 400 Belgian residents got vaccinations in the Lille clinic according to Exaequo, a Belgian L.G.B.T. rights group that helped organize car shares to France.

After getting inoculated, Mr. Serrano described feeling relief — and then guilt. The situation was unfair, he said, for people who couldn't go that day, like his boyfriend, or for those who could not afford the trip.

"It shouldn't be this way," he said. "We felt abandoned in Belgium."

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HEADLINE	08/18 UK train strikes bring summer disruptions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/world/europe/uk-train-strikes.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — Train travel in Britain largely ground to a halt on Thursday, after tens of thousands of railway workers walked out over wage disputes, the latest work stoppage in a summer marked by labor unrest and sweltering heat.</p> <p>It was the sixth railway strike since June, with the walkouts lasting through Saturday in some places during the peak summer travel season. The strike on Friday will target transportation in London.</p>

A series of failed negotiations between railway companies and unions means that only about a fifth of usual trains were running, leaving some places without rail services at all, [according to Network Rail](#), a company that manages the country's railway system. Travelers were advised to make their journeys only if essential.

The walkout came as Britain is experiencing [the fastest rise in consumer prices](#) in four decades, magnifying worries of a cost of living crisis as goods and services, including essentials, are becoming more expensive.

Inflation in Britain rose in July to 10.1 percent, [the government said Wednesday](#), compared with last year — and economists say the worst is yet to come, predicting a peak in the autumn ahead of warnings that households will experience huge rises in energy bills.

“It's really just shot up over the summer months,” said Xiaowei Xu, a senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, a research institute. “People are quite worried about what's coming up.”

Though pay has grown, it has trailed behind prices when adjusted for inflation. Wage growth in the transportation sector has lagged when compared to the economy as a whole, Ms. Xu said, adding that it is easier for workers to find other jobs and leverage in these times.

Still, policymakers are worried that inflation will endure as workers negotiate higher pay and companies raise prices for goods and services to keep up.

The strikes this week are part of protracted face-off between unions and railway companies over wage disparities and pensions that culminated in [the largest railway strike in three decades, in June](#).

That three-day strike stranded travelers between cities and tied up London's streets with cars and bicycles as commuters took detours that sometimes added hours to their usual trip to work.

The government has refused to intervene directly in the strikes. But on Wednesday, officials slammed union leaders, accusing them of using the strikes to avoid reforms to a system they called inefficient, including using technology to complete tasks once done by workers.

“We must make it harder for trade unionists in secure, well-paid jobs to victimize other, much less fortunate workers — by, for instance, stopping them getting to work,” wrote Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, in [The Daily Mail](#). He added [on Twitter](#) that the government had a plan to “rebalance industrial relations in favor of the public.”

One offer to increase pay for railway workers was rejected because it was not in line with inflation, said the main railway union, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, which is representing over 50,000 of the workers striking this week.

The union also said that rail companies had threatened to impose compulsory redundancies if workers did not agree to lift the strike.

“We cannot tolerate being bullied or hoodwinked into accepting a raw deal for our members,” said Mick Lynch, the union's general secretary.

Network Rail called the strike action “unnecessary,” and said it was disappointed that unions had rejected an offer it called “good and fair,” pointing out that revenue from passengers traveling remained lower than prepandemic levels.

According to an estimate from the Office of National Statistics in May, railway workers, including drivers, earned a median salary of 43,747 pounds or about \$52,600 in 2021, though that median fell to 36,800 pounds, or about \$44,250, when driver salaries were excluded.

HEADLINE	08/18 Sleepy Greek port central role US arms hub
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/world/europe/greece-port-russia-ukraine-weapons.html
GIST	<p>ALEXANDROUPOLI, Greece — It is an unlikely geopolitical flash-point: a concrete pier in a little coastal city, barely used a few years ago and still occupied only by sea gulls most of the time.</p> <p>But the sleepy port of Alexandroupoli in northeastern Greece has taken on a central role in increasing the U.S. military presence in Eastern Europe, with the Pentagon transporting enormous arsenals through here in what it describes as the effort to contain Russian aggression. That flow has angered not only Russia but also neighboring Turkey, underlining how war in Ukraine is reshaping Europe’s economic and diplomatic relationships.</p> <p>Turkey and Greece are both NATO members, but there is longstanding animosity between them, including conflict over Cyprus and territorial disputes in the Mediterranean, and Ankara sees a deeper relationship between Athens and Washington as a potential threat.</p> <p>The spike in military activity has been welcomed by the government of Greece, most of its Balkan neighbors and local residents, who hope that Americans will stimulate the regional economy and provide security amid rising regional tensions.</p> <p>“We’re a small country,” said Yiannis Kapelas, 53, an Alexandroupoli cafe owner. “It’s a good thing to have a big country to protect us.”</p> <p>Raising the strategic stakes is the impending sale of the Alexandroupoli port. Four groups of companies are competing to buy a controlling stake — two include American firms, backed by Washington, and two have ties to Russia.</p> <p>U.S. military operations in Greece have expanded greatly since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, and top officials from Moscow and Ankara have called that a national security threat.</p> <p>“Against whom were they established?” President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said in June, referring to the U.S. military outposts in Greece. “The answer they give is ‘against Russia.’ We don’t buy it.”</p> <p>While most of NATO has sided emphatically with Ukraine, Mr. Erdogan — always willing to chart a different course — has positioned Turkey as a mediator.</p> <p>In May, the Greek Foreign Ministry claimed Turkish fighter jets violated the country’s air space over Alexandroupoli, just 11 miles from the Turkish border. The incident unnerved local residents concerned with Turkey’s claims to parts of Greece.</p> <p>The complex interplay of interests at Alexandroupoli highlights how the war is shifting the strategic focus of Europe to the Black Sea region.</p> <p>“The Black Sea is back on the global agenda in an unprecedented way,” said Ilian Vassilev, a former Bulgarian ambassador to Moscow who now works as a strategic consultant. “Security in the Black Sea is central to the issue of how you contain and deal with Russia.”</p> <p>Greece and Russia share deep historical, economic and cultural ties centered on the common Orthodox Christian religion. Greeks are among the few Europeans who largely want to maintain economic ties to Russia, polls show. But the war in Ukraine has badly strained those bonds.</p> <p>The occupation of Ukrainian lands has struck a chord among Greeks, many of whom see parallels between the imperial rhetoric of President Vladimir V. Putin and the territorial claims of Turkey, whose predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, ruled Greece for centuries. The plight of Ukrainians has also resonated with Greek families whose ancestors fled Turkish pogroms in the early 20th century.</p>

“We know about the pain of refugees,” said Dimosthenis Karavoltzos, an Alexandroupoli taverna waiter. “There was no question in my mind about what side we should be on.”

Greece’s conservative government was one of the first to send military aid to Ukraine, prompting the Kremlin to put it on the list of “unfriendly” nations. Fear of Turkey and solidarity with Ukraine have pushed Athens closer to Washington, and it has granted the United States [expanded military access](#) in several locations.

The amount of war matériel moved by the United States through Alexandroupoli jumped nearly 14-fold last year — before the war, but as tensions with Russia mounted — to 3,100 “pieces,” a catchall term used by the Pentagon for all sorts of equipment from tanks to ammunition. It has already matched that figure this year.

U.S. officials say the equipment is destined solely for American military units stationed in Eastern and Northern Europe, not for Ukraine.

The jump in activity is a drastic turnaround for a minor port that stood largely idle for almost a decade, blocked by a sunken barge that the U.S. Navy removed in 2019.

The town’s languid mood is transformed every few months when U.S. warships dock to unload tanks, trucks and artillery. The arrival of hundreds of Americans prompts periodic shortages of eggs and cigarettes, and lines outside tattoo parlors.

Between those bursts of activity, few signs pointed to the city’s new importance. On the beach promenade near the port, couples push strollers, and day trippers, mostly from Turkey, snap selfies under the city’s lighthouse. Civilian shipping remains minimal because of the lack of large cranes, but the Pentagon is installing heavy equipment to handle more cargo.

“What we have done is transform the port into a dynamic military operations hub,” said Andre Cameron, who oversees U.S. military logistics at the port. “Nothing like it has been done here before.”

Local officials said they hoped the military upgrades at the port would attract investments in other industries, turning Alexandroupoli into a trade hub for nearby Bulgaria, Romania and even blockaded Ukraine.

The port’s growing strategic importance has highlighted the Russian ties of two Greek business groups competing to take it over.

One group is led by [Ivan Savvidis](#), a Russian-Greek oligarch who has served in the Russian Parliament and sits on a foreign relations committee advising Mr. Putin. “Greek by birth, Russian by lifestyle, Orthodox by faith,” says [a statement on Mr. Savvidis’s website](#), which features a photo of him with Mr. Putin.

Mr. Savvidis’s bid may be complicated by his ownership of the port of Thessaloniki, Greece’s second largest, which could run afoul of competition laws. His spokesperson declined to comment.

Another bidder, a subsidiary of a Greek conglomerate, [Copelouzos Group](#), is more complex, highlighting Greece’s shifting economic ties.

Copelouzos is the local partner of state-owned Russian gas company, Gazprom, and, in a joint venture called Prometheus Gas, is Greece’s third-largest supplier of natural gas. Copelouzos Group built — and, until 2016, operated — the airport of St. Petersburg.

A diplomatic memo on the group’s founder, Dimitrios Copelouzos, written by the American ambassador to Greece in 2007 and [published by](#) WikiLeaks is titled “Gazprom by any other name?”

Mr. Copelouzos's competitors and detractors claim that these ties make him vulnerable to pressure from Gazprom, compromising the future of Alexandroupoli's strategic operations.

"There are significant concerns because the situation with Russia can deteriorate," said John Charalambakis, an owner of [BlackSummit Financial Group](#), an American asset management firm that is competing for control of Alexandroupoli. "The fact that Russia is using energy as a weapon is an important factor."

Concerns over Mr. Copelouzos's Russian ties are shared by some members of the U.S. Congress, according to two congressional staff members familiar with the matter. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the news media.

Copelouzos Group is privately held and does not make public its financial performance but says that its joint venture with Gazprom represents a tiny share of its business portfolio, which spans construction, real estate and energy.

"The group has many cooperations across the world with many companies," said Ioannis Arapoglou, the Copelouzos Group's general manager. Prometheus Gas "is just one of those, and a relatively small one for the size of the company."

He noted that the Copelouzos family is investing in a project to build a liquid natural gas terminal near Alexandroupoli, meant to reduce Balkan reliance on Russian gas by bolstering supplies from the United States.

For his part, Mr. Charalambakis, the American businessman, says his interest in the port began in 2018, when Washington's ambassador to Greece at the time, Geoffrey Pyatt, told him American companies needed to start competing with Russia and China for influence there.

Washington's growing attention was highlighted on Wednesday, when Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, made a surprise [visit to Alexandroupoli](#).

Greece has been steadily privatizing strategic assets since its debt crisis begun in 2009. The Thessaloniki port went to Mr. Savvidis; the port of Piraeus, Greece's largest, to a Chinese state-owned firm.

Mr. Pyatt, who left the post in May, [has spoken out frequently](#) in support of the two American bids for Alexandroupoli.

The other American bidder, [Quintana Infrastructure & Development](#), declined to comment.

The Copelouzos Group's shift toward American partners mirrors Greece's changing economic reality, as the sanctioned and shrinking Russian economy supplies fewer opportunities.

This pragmatic approach is echoed in Alexandroupoli. Local officials and businessmen hope the war in Ukraine and regional tensions will transform the port into an alternative supply route that bypasses the Turkish-controlled straits to the Black Sea.

"Every crisis creates opportunities," said Konstantinos Chatzikonstantinou, the chief executive of the Alexandroupoli Port Authority.

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HEADLINE	08/17 CDC director calls for huge reorganization
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/us/politics/cdc-rochelle-walensky-covid.html

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on Wednesday delivered a sweeping rebuke of her agency's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, saying it had failed to respond quickly enough and needed to be overhauled.

In a meeting with senior staff, Dr. Walensky outlined in broad terms a plan to reorganize the agency's structure to prioritize public health needs and efforts to curb continuing outbreaks, and to put less emphasis on publication of scientific papers about rare diseases.

The steps announced on Wednesday grew out of an [external review](#) Dr. Walensky had ordered in April, after months of [scathing criticism of the C.D.C.'s response](#) to the pandemic. Its public messages on masking and other mitigation measures were sometimes [so confusing](#) or [abruptly modified](#) that they seemed more like internal drafts than carefully considered proclamations.

The public guidance has been "confusing and overwhelming," according to a briefing document provided by the agency.

Leaders of the agency's Covid team rotated out after only a few months, leaving other senior federal health officials unsure about who was in charge. And important data were sometimes inexplicably released [too late to inform federal decisions](#), including some data on breakthrough infections that could have influenced a recommendation on whether to authorize a round of booster shots.

"For 75 years, C.D.C. and public health have been preparing for Covid-19, and in our big moment, our performance did not reliably meet expectations," Dr. Walensky said in a startling acknowledgment of the agency's failings. "My goal is a new, public health, action-oriented culture at C.D.C. that emphasizes accountability, collaboration, communication and timeliness."

Her plan, which was also described in a video to the agency's more than 11,000 employees, was short on specifics. But it was welcomed by at least some of the agency's two dozen senior staff members, as well as by outside public health specialists.

The agency has been criticized for years as too insular and academic. Many of its experts are accustomed to conducting narrowly focused research that undergoes lengthy reviews, and they are uneasy with the kind of urgent action needed to address the coronavirus, and now the monkeypox outbreak.

In an interview on Monday, Dr. Walensky said she had repeatedly pushed staff members to turn around Covid-19 data as fast as possible. "Some of the data are messy, and some of the data take time," she said. "I've really tried hard to push data out when we had it."

The external review Dr. Walensky ordered was led by James Macrae, who has held senior positions at the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the C.D.C. He interviewed about 120 people inside and outside the agency. His report was not released; one official said it was being completed.

The changes Dr. Walensky described include the appointment of a former Obama administration health official, Mary K. Wakefield, to lead the C.D.C.'s shift to a stronger public health focus. Two scientific divisions will now report directly to Dr. Walensky's office, and the agency will cut down review time for urgently needed studies. The agency is also altering its promotion system so that it rewards efforts to make an impact on public health and is less heavily based on the number of scientific papers published.

The briefing document said that Dr. Walensky wanted staff members to "produce data for action" as opposed to "data for publication."

Importantly, the agency will beef up the team that responds to public health emergencies and require those officials to remain in their positions for at least six months, aides said. Previously, they were allowed to rotate out after only a few months, a system that senior federal officials said sowed confusion and took up valuable time during the pandemic.

	<p>A new executive team will be created to set priorities and make decisions about how to spend the agency’s annual budget of about \$12 billion, “with a bias toward public health impact,” the briefing document said.</p> <p>And the C.D.C. is working on improving its public messaging. Dr. Walensky, who has already shaken up the agency’s communications division, wants to make sure guidance is issued in “plain language, easy to understand,” the document said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Ukraine eyes threat buildup from north
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/17/world/ukraine-russia-news-war#as-russia-falters-in-eastern-and-southern-ukraine-kyiv-eyes-a-threat-from-the-north
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — As Russian forces fail to gain ground in eastern Ukraine and fortify defensive positions in the south, Ukrainian officials are warning of a buildup of Russian long-range missile systems to the north, in Belarus, which has served as a key staging ground for Moscow in the war.</p> <p>Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, the top commander of Ukraine’s Armed Forces, said in a statement on Tuesday that the positioning of Russian missile systems along the Ukrainian border in Belarus “raises concerns.” He specifically cited missiles placed at the Zhyabrovka airfield, about 15 miles from the border.</p> <p>While it is not the first time that Ukrainian officials have warned about a threat from the north, the statement took on added urgency after explosions on Tuesday at a Russian ammunition depot in Crimea, the second Russian military target on the peninsula to be hit by blasts in a week.</p> <p>Ukraine has not publicly claimed responsibility for the blasts — or the explosions last week at the Saki air base on Crimea — but a senior Ukrainian official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that both had been orchestrated by the military and covert operators.</p> <p>As Ukraine increasingly strikes Russian targets deep behind the front lines, with the aid of Western weapons, and orchestrates clandestine assaults against Moscow’s supply lines in eastern and southern Ukraine, the buildup in Belarus has served as a reminder that Russian forces still surround Ukraine from three sides. Russia also retains an overwhelming advantage in heavy weapons.</p> <p>Anton Geraschenko, an adviser to Ukraine’s Interior Ministry, tweeted on Wednesday that Russia had concentrated “a large number of surface-to-air missile systems” at Zhyabrovka, including the S-400, one of Russia’s most advanced anti-aircraft weapons.</p> <p>Yuriy Ihnat, a spokesman for the Air Force Command of Ukraine’s armed forces, also emphasized the threat of a potential Russian attack from Belarus in comments to reporters on Tuesday, while noting that the Ukrainian military regularly observes the movement of Russian troops and equipment around Belarus, Moscow’s most pliant ally.</p> <p>In the early stages of Russia’s invasion, which began in February, President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko of Belarus allowed Russian troops to use its territory to launch a ground operation to try to capture Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, although the effort ultimately failed.</p> <p>Since then, Russia has continued to use Belarus as a staging ground for bombardments. In late July, Ukraine said that 25 missiles had been fired by Russian forces in Belarus toward northern regions of Ukraine. This week, Ukraine’s Air Force said that Russian fighter jets had used Belarusian airspace to launch missiles against the northern city of Zhytomyr.</p> <p>“There has always been a certain threat from the territory of Belarus, and let me remind you that it was its territory that Russia used from the first days of the full-scale invasion,” Mr. Ihnat said, adding: “We must definitely be prepared for possible missile strikes.”</p>

	<p>The buildup comes as a vital link in the supply lines for Russia’s occupation forces in southern Ukraine, the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea, comes under attack.</p> <p>The explosions in Crimea have undermined Moscow’s control of the peninsula, which it illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. President Vladimir V. Putin has called Crimea Russia’s “holy land.”</p> <p>While the extent of the damage from the blasts remains unclear, Ukrainian officials are preparing for a response from Moscow, which labeled the explosion at the ammunition depot an “act of sabotage” — an apparent acknowledgment that the war is spreading to what the Kremlin considers Russian territory. Last week, after the blasts at the air base, Russian media reported that the commander of the Kremlin’s Black Sea naval fleet, which is based in Crimea, was replaced.</p> <p>The British defense intelligence agency said on Wednesday that “Russian commanders will highly likely be increasingly concerned with the apparent deterioration in security across Crimea, which functions as a rear base area for the occupation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Soaring inflation can’t lure retirees to work
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/even-soaring-inflation-cant-lure-many-retirees-back-to-work/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg</i> - Employers battling to fill job vacancies in the tight U.S. labor market this year have had a silver lining, as it were: decades-high inflation was bringing retired people back to the workforce.</p> <p>But recent data suggests the trend already may be petering out.</p> <p>The United States probably has reached a point where the older workers who hadn’t intended to retire permanently, or who had involuntarily been forced into retirement, have since rejoined the labor force, said Nick Bunker, economic research director for North America at recruitment firm Indeed.</p> <p>“We are getting closer to the bottom of that talent pool,” he said.</p> <p>Before the pandemic, Americans generally ebbed and flowed in and out of retirement, with about 3% of retirees returning to employment each year for various reasons — from financial struggles to a great job opportunity or simply boredom.</p> <p>COVID-19 disrupted that pattern, with many baby boomers retiring early or staying out of the labor pool out of concern about the virus in 2020 and 2021. They contributed to the mass exodus of workers that was dubbed the Great Resignation.</p> <p>However, by this spring, the number of retirees headed back to work climbed back again to about 3.3%, according to data from Indeed — possibly lured back by soaring consumer prices and plentiful jobs.</p> <p>Last month, the percentage of workers who were retired a year earlier and who returned to the labor force stood at 3.2%, according to Indeed. The rate has stopped accelerating and may decrease or stay flat in the near future, according to Bunker. Meanwhile, moves into retirement are edging up.</p> <p>Overall, the number of available positions in the United States has decreased slightly from historical highs, according to data from the Labor Department. But the number of vacancies remains elevated as demand for workers broadly outweighs supply.</p> <p>Indeed data indicates that businesses won’t get much relief from retirees.</p> <p>It’s unlikely employers strapped for help will see another new rush of older workers coming off the sidelines, Bunker said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Misleading Covid rapid test results warning
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/officials-warn-of-misleading-covid-rapid-test-results-sick-but-negative/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — At-home coronavirus screening has become a way of life for many people, but some medical experts are cautioning that one test may not be enough to definitively determine whether someone is infected.</p> <p>Health officials stress that at-home tests are a vital and accurate way of tracking COVID-19 infections, but an initial negative test doesn't mean people are out of the woods.</p> <p>The U.S. Food and Drug Administration suggested last week that testing to see if they are infected should use multiple tests over several days.</p> <p>“When you perform an at-home COVID-19 antigen test, and you get a positive result, the results are typically accurate,” government officials wrote in a public statement. “However, if you perform an at-home COVID-19 antigen test, you could get a false negative result.”</p> <p>Because of this, the agency “recommends repeat testing following a negative result, whether or not you have COVID-19 symptoms.”</p> <p>The risk of misleading results seems to be higher among symptomatic people infected with the latest dominant omicron subvariant, BA.5, compared with earlier versions. This, experts say, further illustrates the importance of follow-up testing.</p> <p>“If your first home antigen test is negative, we recommend repeating it in 24 to 48 hours,” Dr. Ralph Gonzales, a University of California, San Francisco associate dean, said during a recent campus town hall.</p> <p>Gonzales said he noticed an additional lag in how long it takes a rapid test to turn positive following the onset of symptoms — especially early on.</p> <p>Some people aren't testing positive using rapid tests until four or five days after they start to show symptoms, according to UC San Francisco infectious diseases expert Dr. Peter Chin-Hong.</p> <p>“That's very common these days,” he said.</p> <p>At-home COVID-19 rapid tests are expected to detect a coronavirus infection at least 80% of the time, according to the FDA. By contrast, a lab-based PCR test is generally expected to detect the virus 95% of the time.</p> <p>But PCR tests can take a day or longer to process, while rapid test results are available within 15 minutes.</p> <p>If you have COVID-19 symptoms and get a negative rapid test result, the FDA suggests testing again 48 hours later. If the second test is negative and you're still concerned your symptoms are caused by COVID-19, the FDA suggests either a third rapid test or a lab-based PCR test.</p> <p>“People should use multiple tests over a certain time period, such as two to three days, especially when the people using the tests don't have COVID-19 symptoms,” the agency said in its statement. “The FDA is highlighting the continued need for repeat, or serial, testing when people get a negative result with an at-home COVID-19 antigen test, including recommending additional testing over a longer period of time.”</p> <p>There are a couple of reasons why it's taking longer from the onset of symptoms for some people to test positive using a rapid kit.</p> <p>The omicron variant family is generally more likely to begin infection in the throat, Chin-Hong said, meaning “it takes a while to go up to the nose.”</p>

So, if you're just swabbing your nose during a test "and you have a sore throat, it may mean that you're not getting virus there yet," he said.

Another possible reason is that the immune systems of people who have been vaccinated and boosted are more likely to recognize an exposure to the coronavirus quickly, triggering symptoms early as a way to fight off disease but before there are levels of virus in the body high enough for a rapid test to detect.

Before widespread vaccinations, the immune system took a relatively long time before recognizing the coronavirus and triggering an immune response.

But "in a vaccinated and boosted person, they already have immune cells floating around to recognize the enemy. And when you get infected, the immune system activates much faster," Chin-Hong said. "Now, the immune system is saying, 'Hey, something's up!' and you start to feel ill, but actually, there is not much virus around."

As a result, in a vaccinated and boosted person, the body can quickly issue its alarm indicating COVID-19 has arrived, but it can take longer for enough of the virus to be detectable by a rapid test.

Whatever the reason, any potential delay in confirming coronavirus infection is all the more reason for residents to abide by one of the most often-cited public health mantras over the past two and a half years: Stay home if you feel sick.

"If you have symptoms of respiratory illness, if you have symptoms that you think may indicate that you might have COVID, please, please, please stay home," said Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer. "Use those rapid tests; they're generally fairly reliable. But if you still have symptoms, and you're testing negative, go ahead and get a PCR test."

If you do get a negative PCR test result and are still symptomatic, Ferrer said you should contact your health care provider.

"But no matter what you're infected with — until you're better, you should not expose others," she said during a recent briefing.

If you don't have COVID-19 symptoms but believe you've been exposed to the coronavirus, the FDA suggests getting at least three negative rapid test results, testing every 48 hours. If you're still concerned, you can take a fourth rapid test after another 48 hours or get a PCR test.

Some people might say they've repeatedly tested negative, but they are actually taking a rapid test at, say, 10 a.m., and then at 2 p.m., which doesn't really help people figure out their true infection status, Ferrer said. Testing 24 to 48 hours later provides more meaningful information, she said.

"Diagnostic testing remains a cornerstone of our nation's fight against COVID-19," the FDA said in its statement. "At-home COVID-19 antigen tests, while not perfect, provide a fast and convenient COVID-19 testing option."

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HEADLINE	08/17 Youth mental health in crisis; schools?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/youth-mental-health-is-in-crisis-are-schools-doing-enough/
GIST	<p>CECILIA, Ky. (AP) — For fourth-grader Leah Rainey, the school day now begins with what her teacher calls an "emotional check-in."</p> <p>"It's great to see you. How are you feeling?" chirps a cheery voice on her laptop screen. It asks her to click an emoji matching her state of mind: Happy. Sad. Worried. Angry. Frustrated. Calm. Silly. Tired.</p>

Depending on the answer, Leah, 9, gets advice from a cartoon avatar on managing her mood and a few more questions: Have you eaten breakfast? Are you hurt or sick? Is everything OK at home? Is someone at school being unkind? Today, Leah chooses “silly,” but says she struggled with sadness during online learning.

At Lakewood Elementary School, all 420 students will start their days the same way this year. The rural Kentucky school is one of thousands across the country using the technology to screen students’ state of mind and alert teachers to anyone struggling.

In some ways, this year’s back-to-school season will restore a degree of pre-pandemic normalcy: Most districts have lifted mask mandates, dropped COVID vaccine requirements and ended rules on social distancing and quarantines.

But many of the pandemic’s longer-lasting impacts remain a troubling reality for schools. Among them: the harmful effects of isolation and remote learning on children’s emotional well-being.

Student mental health reached crisis levels last year, and the pressure on schools to figure out solutions has never been greater. Districts across the country are using federal pandemic money to hire more mental health specialists, rolling out new coping tools and expanding curriculum that prioritizes emotional health.

Still, some parents don’t believe schools should be involved in mental health at all. So-called social-emotional learning, or SEL, has become the latest political flashpoint, with conservatives saying schools use it to promote progressive ideas about race, gender and sexuality, or that a focus on well-being takes attention from academics.

But at schools like Lakewood, educators say helping students manage emotions and stress will benefit them in the classroom and throughout life.

The school, in a farming community an hour’s drive south of Louisville, has used federal money to create “take-a-break” corners in each classroom. Students can rifle through a “self-regulation kit” with tips on deep breathing, squishy stress balls and acupuncture rings, said school counselor Shelly Kerr. The school plans to build a “Reset Room” this fall, part of an emerging national trend to create campus sanctuaries where students can go to decompress and speak with a counselor.

The online student screener Lakewood uses, called Closegap, helps teachers identify shy, quiet kids who might need to talk and would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Closegap founder Rachel Miller launched the online platform in 2019 with a few schools and saw interest explode after the pandemic hit. This year, she said, more than 3,600 U.S. schools will be using the technology, which has free and premium versions.

“We are finally beginning to recognize that school is more than just teaching the kids reading, writing and arithmetic,” said Dan Domenech, executive director of the national School Superintendents Association. Just as free lunch programs are based on the idea that a hungry child can’t learn, more and more schools are embracing the idea that a cluttered or troubled mind cannot focus on schoolwork, he said.

The pandemic magnified the fragility of mental health among American youth, who had been experiencing a rise in depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts for years, experts say. A recent report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found 44% of high school students said they experienced “persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” during the pandemic, with girls and LGBTQ youth reporting the highest levels of poor mental health and suicide attempts.

If a silver lining exists, the pandemic raised awareness of the crisis and helped de-stigmatize talking about mental health, while also bringing attention to schools’ shortcomings in handling it. President Joe Biden’s administration recently announced over \$500 million to expand mental health services in the country’s schools, adding to federal and state money that has poured into schools to cope with pandemic-era needs.

Still, many are skeptical schools' responses are enough.

"All of these opportunities and resources are temporary," said junior Claire Chi, who attends State College Area High School in central Pennsylvania. Last year, her school added emergency counseling and therapy dogs, among other supports, but most of that help lasted a day or two, Chi said. And that's "not really a mental health investment for students." This year, the school says it has added more counselors and plans mental health training for all 10th graders.

Some critics, including many conservative parents, don't want to see mental health support in schools in the first place. Asra Nomani, a mom from Fairfax County, Virginia, says schools are using the mental health crisis as a "Trojan horse" to introduce liberal ideas about sexual and racial identity. She also worries schools lack the expertise to deal with student mental illness.

"Social-emotional well-being has become an excuse to intervene in the lives of children in the most intimate of ways that are both dangerous and irresponsible," Nomani said, "because they're in the hands of people who are not trained professionals."

Despite the unprecedented funding, schools are having trouble hiring counselors, mirroring the shortages in other American industries.

Goshen Junior High School in northwest Indiana has been struggling to fill a vacancy of a counselor who left last year, when student anxiety and other behavioral problems were "off the charts," said Jan Desmarais-Morse, one of two counselors left at the school, with caseloads of 500 students each.

"One person trying to meet the needs of 500 students?" said Desmarais-Morse said. "It's impossible."

The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per school counselor, which few states come close to meeting.

For the 2020-21 school year only two states — New Hampshire and Vermont — achieved that goal, according to an Associated Press analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Some states face staggeringly high ratios: Arizona averages one counselor to 716 students; in Michigan, 1 to 638; and in Minnesota, 1 to 592.

Also in Indiana, the School City of Hammond won a grant to hire clinical therapists at all 17 of its schools but has not been able to fill most of the new jobs, said Superintendent Scott Miller. "Schools are stealing from other schools. There just aren't enough workers to go around." And despite more funding, school salaries can't compete with private counseling practices, which are also overwhelmed and trying to hire more staff.

Another challenge for schools: identifying struggling children before they're in emotional crisis. At the Houston Independent School District, one of the largest in the country with 277 schools and nearly 200,000 students, students are asked each morning to hold up fingers showing how they feel. One finger means a child is hurting deeply; five means she or he feels great.

"It's identifying your brush fires early in the day," said Sean Ricks, the district's senior manager of crisis intervention.

Houston teachers now give mindfulness lessons, with ocean sounds played via YouTube, and a Chihuahua named Luci and a cockapoo named Omi have joined the district's crisis team.

Grant-funding helped Houston build relaxation rooms, known as Thinkeries, at 10 schools last year, costing about \$5,000 each. District data show campuses with Thinkeries, which sport bean bag chairs and warmly colored walls, saw a 62% decrease in calls to a crisis line last year, Ricks said. The district is building more this year.

	<p>But the rooms themselves are not a panacea. For the calming rooms to work, schools must teach students to recognize they feel angry or frustrated. Then they can use the space to decompress before their emotions erupt, said Kevin Dahill-Fuchel, executive director of Counseling in Schools, a nonprofit that helps schools bolster mental health services.</p> <p>In the last days of summer vacation, a “Well Space” at University High School in Irvine, California, was getting finishing touches from an artist who painted a mural of a giant moon over mountains. Potted succulents, jute rugs, Buddha-like statuettes and a hanging egg chair brought an un-school-like feel. When school starts this week, the room is to be staffed full-time with a counselor or mental health specialist.</p> <p>The goal is to normalize the idea of asking for help and give students a place to reset. “If they can re-center and refocus,” said Tammy Blakely, the district’s director of student support services, “they can then, after a short break, go back into their classrooms and be prepared for deeper learning.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 CDC probes ‘fast-moving’ E. coli outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/health/e-coli-outbreak-michigan-ohio.html
GIST	<p>Federal health officials said Wednesday that they were investigating an E. coli outbreak that has been linked to a growing number of illnesses in Ohio and Michigan.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that no food had been identified yet as the source of the “fast-moving” outbreak, which has sickened 14 people in Ohio and 15 in Michigan. Nine people have been hospitalized. No deaths have been reported.</p> <p>The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services said Tuesday that it had received reports of 98 cases of E. coli infections in August, compared with 20 cases during the same period last year. The investigation is in the early stages, the department said, and laboratory results have linked some of the cases to one another.</p> <p>“While reports of E. coli illness typically increase during the warmer summer months, this significant jump in cases is alarming,” Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, Michigan’s chief medical executive, said in a statement.</p> <p>“This is a reminder to make sure to follow best practices when it comes to hand hygiene and food handling to prevent these kinds of foodborne illness,” she said.</p> <p>Anyone who experiences E. coli symptoms such as cramping, diarrhea or gastrointestinal distress should contact their health care provider, especially if such symptoms are severe, Bagdasarian said.</p> <p>Other common symptoms include vomiting and fever. Symptoms usually start three to four days after swallowing E. coli bacteria, and most people recover without treatment within five to seven days, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Some people may develop a type of kidney failure and require hospitalization, the CDC said. The current outbreak has affected people from 6 to 91 years old.</p> <p>The Ohio Department of Health said that cases had been reported in Wood, Lucas, Mahoning, Clermont, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Lorain and Summit counties. Four people in Ohio have been hospitalized in connection with the outbreak, the department said.</p> <p>The CDC urged people to prevent infection by washing their hands as well as their utensils and cooking surfaces, rinsing fruits and vegetables under running water, keeping raw meat, poultry and seafood away from other foods and cooking meat to a temperature high enough to kill germs.</p>

	<p>Heath officials also advise people to thaw foods in the refrigerator instead of on the counter. Other recommendations include not swallowing water in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools and backyard “kiddie” pools.</p> <p>E. coli is commonly found in the intestines, and infections can begin when someone ingests food contaminated with feces, according to the CDC.</p> <p>In 2019, an E. coli outbreak linked to romaine lettuce infected 167 people in 27 states, according to the CDC. No deaths were reported but 85 people were hospitalized, including 15 people who had kidney failure.</p> <p>Lab testing and data analysis showed the outbreak was caused by the same strain of E. coli that led to outbreaks linked to leafy greens in 2017 and to romaine lettuce in 2018.</p> <p>E. coli outbreaks last year were linked to packaged salads, baby spinach, cake mix and an unknown food source, according to the CDC.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Seattle ties record most 90deg. days in year
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/seattle-90-degree-day-record/281-8767a4f9-2c9c-4de1-b930-c430093a6fa2
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle needs one more 90-degree day to tie the record for the most in a year.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the temperature hit 90 degrees around 5 p.m. at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, according to the National Weather Service. That makes for the 11th 90-degree day of this year, tying the record set in 2018.</p> <p>The most 90-degree days in recorded history in Seattle occurred in 2015, with 12, KING 5 Meteorologist Chris Nunley previously reported.</p> <p>The Seattle area had a record six straight days of 90-plus degrees at the end of July. That was the longest stretch of days at that temperature in the 77 years records have been kept.</p> <p>The heat should peak on Thursday, with highs in the mid-80s to low to mid-90s, with some of the hotter spots near the Cascade foothills pushing the upper 90s. Daily record highs Thursday are in the upper 80s and lower 90s.</p> <p>Unlike last month, the heat doesn't last long. Increased onshore winds for Friday will cool us back to the upper 70s and low 80s in most places</p> <p>The summer weather continues through the weekend with plenty of sunshine and highs staying in the pleasant mid 70s to low 80s.</p> <p>There may be some increase in the morning clouds Monday dropping highs to the mid-70s to near 80. It looks like the sunny and warm weather should last through the week next week but there are indications it might heat back to the mid to upper 80s later in the week.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Fears mount: special attack from Belarus
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/is-vladimir-putin-planning-to-unleash-a-special-attack-from-belarus-on-ukraines-independence-day?ref=home
GIST	Fears are mounting among Ukrainian officials that Russian President Vladimir Putin might choose to escalate his attacks on Ukraine during the country’s Independence Day holiday next week.

“We must definitely be prepared for possible missile strikes,” said [Yuriy Ihnat](#), spokesperson for the Air Force Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, on Wednesday. He warned that Russia has a preference for using certain special dates for so-called “congratulations.”

There are concerns that Russia might use Belarus as a launchpad for attacks given a flurry of movements observed there in recent days, according to Ihnat.

“We constantly observe the movement of [Russian] troops in the territory of Belarus, as well as the transportation of ammunition, Iskander, and other types of missiles. This happens all the time. If an Il-76 flies from the Russian Federation to the territory of Belarus, then it is clear that it delivers weapons,” Ihnat said.

Russia might up the ante along the entire front, according to a representative of the [Chief Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine](#), Andrii Yusov.

“In the near future, there will be very tense situation at the entire front,” Yusov said. “In particular, now there are talks about Independence Day.”

The timing of any potential flare-up remains to be seen, of course. But whether or not Independence Day looms, Russia’s efforts to store missiles in Zhiatovka airfield, which is located about 15 miles from the Ukraine-Belarus border, has begun to worry [Valeriy Zaluzhnyi](#), Ukraine’s Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, he said Tuesday.

“The location of missile systems along the state border shared with the Republic of Belarus, in particular at the Zhiatovka airfield, triggers concern,” Zaluzhnyi said in a Telegram post of the Zhiatovka airfield, which the Russians control and which hosts Russian forces.

In particular, Russia has been storing S-400 systems, advanced anti-aircraft weaponry, near the Ukraine-Belarus border, which is raising alarm about Russia’s next moves, according to [Anton Geraschenko](#), an adviser to Ukraine’s Interior Ministry.

Independent military analysis shows Belarus may be preparing for an attack as well. Forces have been building up at Zhiatovka airfield, according to Belarusian Hajun, a military analysis organization.

“An analysis of the situation at the airfield proves that the likelihood of rocket attacks on Ukrainian territory not only remains, but it seems that the Russians are preparing for a massive missile attack on Ukraine in the coming weeks,” Belarusian Hajun said in a Telegram post.

Fighters were spotted over the Kobryn and Diarova districts on Wednesday, [the organization said](#).

It’s not the first time Russia has used Belarus to stage attacks on Ukraine in the war, which is nearing the end of its sixth month. In the early days of the war, Russian forces used [Belarus to try to launch an invasion effort focused on capturing the capital of Ukraine](#), Kyiv. The operation ultimately failed.

Since then, [Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko](#) has announced combat readiness drills that could take Belarus from peacetime to wartime in June, and has been working to build up a military unit focused on the country’s border with Ukraine.

The news of a potential flashpoint with Belarus coincides with Putin facing several embarrassing military setbacks in recent days—including a [damaging attack](#) at an airfield in Crimea that Ukraine reportedly launched—which former diplomats have said may prompt Russia to lean harder on Belarus. Lukashenko’s relationship with Putin has been a give-and-take for some years now: Putin supported Lukashenko after dissent built around the legitimacy of his 2020 election, and the two countries have long been developing a “union state” relationship centered around enmeshing the two nations.

	<p>The Biden administration Wednesday lambasted Lukashenko's decision to repeatedly allow Russian forces into its country to attack Ukraine.</p> <p>"The regime has set aside what should be Belarus' own sovereignty and independence and in a way, its territorial integrity by permitting Russia's forces on to—again what should be sovereign Belarusian soil—to launch a brutal, premeditated, unjustified attack against its neighbor to the south," the State Department's top spokesperson, Ned Price, told reporters Wednesday.</p> <p>In recent weeks, Russia appears to be leaning on Belarus once more. Ukraine has been suffering from Russian attacks emanating from Belarus as air raid sirens seek to warn residents of incoming hits, according to Ukrainian authorities. On Tuesday, Russian missiles targeted Ukraine's Zhytomyr district, a region Russian forces have targeted on numerous occasions in recent months, Zhytomyr Mayor Serhiy Sukhomlyn said.</p> <p>Vitaly Bunechko, the head of the regional military administration, confirmed the missiles originated from Belarusian territory and urged residents to pay attention to air raid sirens.</p> <p>"Following explosions in the Zhytomyr district, which occurred as a result of enemy missiles launched from the territory of Belarus, fortunately, there are no victims," Bunechko said. "Once again, we call on the residents of the region not to ignore air warning signals and to stay in shelters if they hear the sound of sirens."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 After-effects of a Covid infection years later
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/covid-can-disturb-mental-and-brain-health-even-two-years-after-infection?ref=home
GIST	<p>As infections go, Jeffrey Siegelman's first bout with COVID was unremarkable. The emergency physician and professor at Emory School of Medicine likely contracted the virus while on the job in August 2020. He experienced the usual symptoms—fever, headaches, aches, chills, and loss of smell and taste. But in the weeks after he recovered, other symptoms set in, including heart palpitations, insomnia, and significant fatigue after even minor physical exertion. The headaches also never went away, he said.</p> <p>"Here we are two years later, and I'm still dealing with a lot of that stuff," Siegelman told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>Tens of millions of Americans, Siegelman included, are suffering with the after-effects of a COVID infection. Long COVID, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, represents "a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems" that people experience weeks after being infected with the virus. A new study, published Wednesday in The Lancet Psychiatry, measured the range of ongoing neurological and psychiatric symptoms that over a million people faced after a diagnosed COVID infection, and compared them to people who contracted any other respiratory virus.</p> <p>The biggest takeaway is that these neurological and psychiatric symptoms can linger for at least two years after infection in some people. But the results have to do with more than just COVID—according to the authors, they underscore the need for a new and thorough commitment to mental health infrastructure to support increasingly strained health care systems.</p> <p>"It's well-established that adults, in the few months after diagnosis of COVID-19, are at an increased risk of a range of neurological and psychiatric conditions," lead study author Maxime Taquet, an Oxford University psychiatry researcher, said during a press briefing. "There's quite a few questions that remain unanswered, and the first one is what happens after six months."</p> <p>The researchers analyzed the health records of nearly 1.5 million patients diagnosed with COVID, and matched them with other respiratory illness patients based on variables including age, sociodemographics, and risk factors. Then they determined if members from each group were diagnosed with any of some 14 psychiatric or neurological disorders, and when. These conditions ranged from anxiety and mood disorders</p>

to insomnia to dementia—according to Oxford psychiatric neuroscientist and study co-author Paul Harrison, these conditions are “intersecting with the long COVID story” but do not capture the full range of symptoms reported by patients.

For some of the conditions the researchers studied—including anxiety and mood disorder, stroke, and insomnia—COVID patients’ risks started out higher but decreased over the course of the two years and became similar to the people who contracted other respiratory illnesses. This finding is “very reassuring,” Taquet said.

But on the flip side, the risk of other disorders—including brain fog, dementia, psychotic disorders, and epilepsy and seizures—can remain high even after those two years. The researchers found that, compared to the other respiratory infection patients, more new cases of these conditions were still being diagnosed in people two years after a COVID infection.

The researchers also compared the diagnosis rates of these conditions among patients infected with alpha, delta, and omicron variants of the virus. They found that the emergence of the delta variant corresponded to an increased risk of neurological and psychiatric diagnoses.

Still, the risks between delta and omicron were largely similar—leading the authors to conclude that “health services will likely continue to face a similar rate of these post COVID-19 diagnoses even with SARS-CoV-2 variants that lead to otherwise less severe disease.”

Siegelman said that there’s a misconception that long COVID is actually depression or anxiety, and that the virus can’t possibly be causing long-lasting physical symptoms. The new study “argues pretty strongly that it’s not,” and that these symptoms can last for years or longer, he said.

Though the study was large and tracked people over a comparably long period of time, the researchers said there were several limitations on its generalizability. For one, using electronic health records and confirmed COVID diagnoses restricted their sample to people who may have had easier access to health care or a more severe course of infection. In particular, the reliance on health records may have excluded communities of color, who are underrepresented in both research and medical care, Siegelman said.

Even Taquet’s own experience underscores this point: “There are people who have had COVID-19, including myself, who did not seek medical attention and therefore that would not feature in their health records,” he said.

Relying on electronic health record data also prevented the researchers from comparing rates of conditions based on disease severity or vaccination status, and the study does not explain how and why COVID leads to an increased risk of neurological and psychiatric diagnoses. Ongoing research is underway by labs all over the world to address these questions.

While an associated [essay in *The Lancet Psychiatry*](#) called for further investigation by forward-looking, prospective studies, Siegelman said that it’s not too soon to start taking action to help people with long COVID, as a clinician and patient himself.

“I think there’s enough evidence here that there’s a large group of people that have been infected, that are still suffering, and they deserve attention,” he said.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Monkeypox breakthrough cases emerge
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/monkeypox-vaccine-silver-bullet-breakthrough-cases-emerge/story?id=88510794
GIST	As demand for monkeypox vaccines increases, the World Health Organization (WHO) has begun to receive preliminary reports on the efficacy of the shots, which suggests there are breakthrough cases occurring, officials said Wednesday.

"We have known from the beginning that this vaccine would not be a silver bullet, that it would not meet all the expectations that are being put on it, and that we don't have firm efficacy data or effectiveness data in this context," officials said during a press conference.

Some of the reports of breakthrough cases have been among people who received a prophylaxis vaccine after exposure.

"The fact we're beginning to see some breakthrough cases is also really important information because it tells us that the vaccine is not 100% effective in any given circumstance. Whether preventive or post-exposure, we cannot expect 100% effectiveness at the moment based on this emerging information," officials said.

This occurrence of breakthrough infections is not new, officials noted, explaining that a limited study from the 1980s demonstrated that the vaccines offered about 85% protection against monkeypox.

"[The] vaccine is not a silver bullet," officials said, "that every person who feels that they're at risk and wishes to lower their own level of risk [has] many interventions at their disposal, which includes vaccinations where available, but also includes protection from activities where there may be a risk -- reducing [the] number of sex partners, avoiding group sex or casual sex, and, specifically, when a vaccine is, in fact, administered, waiting until that vaccine has the time to produce a maximum immune response."

Earlier this month, the Biden administration announced it would move forward with a plan to increase the U.S. monkeypox vaccine supply by as much as five times, using an injection method that requires less vaccine per shot.

Globally, more than 38,000 cases of monkeypox have now been confirmed, according to the CDC, including more than 13,500 cases in the U.S.

The majority of cases, in the current monkeypox outbreak, have been detected in gay, bisexual or other men who have sex with men. However, health officials have repeatedly stressed that anyone can contract the virus.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Israel, Turkey in diplomatic reconciliation
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/israel-turkey-exchange-ambassadors-diplomatic-reset-88489728
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM -- Israel and Turkey will restore full diplomatic relations and dispatch ambassadors for the first time in years, the latest step in months of reconciliation between the two countries, the Israeli prime minister's office said Wednesday.</p> <p>The two countries, once friendly, had a more than decadelong falling out, but earlier this year Israel and Turkey began a process of rapprochement.</p> <p>"The resumption of relations with (Turkey) is an important asset for regional stability and very important economic news for the citizens of Israel," said Israel's caretaker prime minister, Yair Lapid.</p> <p>Lapid later spoke by phone with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and expressed hope that the strengthening of ties would lead to "many achievements, especially in the fields of commerce and tourism," according to a statement from the Israeli prime minister's office.</p> <p>Once warm relations between Israel and Turkey disintegrated under Erdogan, who has been an outspoken critic of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians. Israel, in turn, has objected to Turkey's embrace of the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip.</p>

The countries withdrew their respective ambassadors in 2010, after Israeli forces stormed a Gaza-bound flotilla carrying humanitarian aid for Palestinians that broke an Israeli blockade. The incident resulted in the deaths of nine Turkish activists.

Following an attempt at mending ties, Turkey recalled its ambassador in 2018 after the United States moved its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war. It later annexed east Jerusalem, a move unrecognized by most countries, which maintain their embassies in the coastal metropolis of Tel Aviv. The Palestinians seek east Jerusalem as capital of a future state.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu confirmed the decision to reappoint ambassadors and said Ankara would be sending its ambassador to Tel Aviv. He said however, that Turkey would continue to support the Palestinians despite the normalization process with Israel.

"A dialogue process began with Israel after the new government took office," Cavusoglu told reporters. "The appointment of ambassadors was among the steps we said we would take to normalize relations."

"We will continue to defend the rights of Palestine, Jerusalem and Gaza," he added.

Turkey, beset by economic troubles, has been trying to end its international isolation by normalizing ties with several countries in the Mideast, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this year, Lapid visited Ankara in June, a month after his Turkish counterpart visited Jerusalem, the first high-level visit by a Turkish official in 15 years. In March, Israel's figurehead president, Isaac Herzog, met with Erdogan in the Turkish capital.

"Upgrading relations will contribute to deepening ties between the two peoples, expanding economic, trade, and cultural ties, and strengthening regional stability," Lapid's office said.

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HEADLINE	08/18 Flash flood western China kills 16
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/16-dead-36-missing-flash-flood-western-china-88529273
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- At least 16 people have died and 36 others are missing after a sudden rainstorm in western China triggered a landslide that diverted a river and caused flash flooding in populated areas, Chinese state media said Thursday.</p> <p>Rescuers have found two more people reported missing earlier and were searching for the others, state broadcaster CCTV said in an online report. The Wednesday night disaster affected more than 6,000 people in six villages in Qinghai province, CCTV said.</p> <p>China is facing both heavy rains and flooding in some parts of the country this summer and extreme heat and drought in other regions. State media has described the heat and drought as the worst since record-keeping started 60 years ago.</p> <p>Emergency authorities described the flash flooding in Qinghai's Datong county as a "mountain torrent." Such torrents generally result from heavy squalls in mountainous areas. Water running down the mountain can turn gullies or streams into raging rivers, catching people by surprise.</p> <p>Seven people died last weekend from a mountain torrent in southwestern China's Sichuan province.</p> <p>Elsewhere in Sichuan and other provinces, crops are wilting and factories have been shut down as a drought cut hydropower supplies and high temperatures raised electricity demand.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Heavy rain pelts New Zealand; evacuations
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/heavy-rains-pelt-zealand-forcing-hundreds-evacuate-88524159
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- Heavy rain continued to pelt New Zealand on Thursday, causing further disruptions and road closures from a storm that has already forced hundreds of people to evacuate their homes.</p> <p>Residents in the northern part of North Island found themselves isolated after landslides, fallen trees and floodwaters blocked highway access. The stormy weather also forced some schools to close, airlines to cancel flights and business to shutter.</p> <p>The storm sunk at least one sailboat near Auckland and caused a home to slip down into a gully in the town of Tāhunanui.</p> <p>About 230 homes in the town of Nelson were evacuated Wednesday and remained off-limits overnight after the Maitai River flooded. The military patrolled the area overnight.</p> <p>Resident Robin Reichert told news outlet Stuff that she was “utterly shocked” when her street turned into a raging torrent.</p> <p>“Within minutes it’s a river,” she said. “That’s how fast it happens.”</p> <p>Another 160 homes in the town of Westport were also temporarily evacuated with residents later allowed to return.</p> <p>Roads throughout the nation were closed due to flooding and landslides.</p> <p>In the Buller region, Mayor Jamie Cleine told reporters that the rain had so far been lower than forecast but there was more rain on the way.</p> <p>“Right across the district I believe we have got away relatively unscathed,” Cleine said. “A few people that did choose to self-evacuate last night have been told today that it’s reasonably safe, if they feel OK, to head back to their properties today to check them out while we have this lull.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 US delegation in Kenya amid election crisis
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-congressional-delegation-kenya-amid-election-crisis-88529271
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- A U.S. congressional delegation has arrived in Kenya to meet with the new president-elect and the opposition figure likely to file a court challenge to his election loss in the latest electoral crisis for East Africa’s most stable democracy.</p> <p>The new U.S. ambassador to Kenya, Meg Whitman, said the delegation led by Sen. Chris Coons also will meet with outgoing Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, who has been publicly silent since the largely peaceful Aug. 9 election.</p> <p>President-elect William Ruto is Kenyatta’s deputy president, but the two fell out years ago, and Kenyatta in the election backed longtime opposition figure Raila Odinga instead.</p> <p>Odinga has said he is exploring “all constitutional and legal options” to challenge his close election loss. His campaign has a week from Monday’s declaration of Ruto’s win to go to the Supreme Court, which then has 14 days to rule. Odinga has urged his supporters to remain calm in a country with a history of post-election violence.</p>

	<p>Kenya's electoral commission publicly split in chaos just minutes before Monday's declaration, with commissioners accusing each other of misconduct. The four commissioners who objected to Monday's declaration were appointed by Kenyatta last year.</p> <p>The split came as a shock to many Kenyans after an election widely seen as the country's most transparent ever, with results from the more than 46,000 polling stations posted online for the public to follow along. Public tallies, including one by a local election observer group, added up to a Ruto win with just over 50% of the votes.</p> <p>The political transition in Kenya will have significant impact on the East Africa region, where Kenyatta had been working with the U.S. to try to mediate in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and promoting peace efforts between Rwanda and Congo. Ruto in his public comments this week has focused on domestic matters, not regional ones.</p> <p>The 55-year-old Ruto appealed to Kenyans by making the election about economic differences and not the ethnic ones that have long marked the country's politics with sometimes deadly results. He portrayed himself as an outsider from humble beginnings defying the political dynasties of Kenyatta and Odinga, whose fathers were Kenya's first president and vice president.</p> <p>The 77-year-old Odinga has pursued the presidency for a quarter-century. He is renowned as a fighter and was detained for years in the 1980s over his push for multiparty democracy. He was also a supporter of Kenya's groundbreaking 2010 constitution.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Drought then downpours: France, England
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/drought-now-downpours-storms-slam-france-england-88494940
GIST	<p>PARIS -- After a summer of drought, heat waves and forest fires, violent storms are whipping France and neighboring countries and have flooded Paris subway stations, snarled traffic and disrupted the president's agenda.</p> <p>Winds over 100 kph (60 mph) were recorded at the top of the Eiffel Tower during a flash flood Tuesday, and similar winds were forecast Wednesday in the southeast.</p> <p>Hail hammered Paris and other regions in Tuesday's sudden storm. Rainwater gushed down metro station stairwells and onto platforms, and cars slogged along embankments where the Seine River broke its banks.</p> <p>In southern France, thunderstorms overnight and Wednesday flooded the Old Port of Marseille and the city's main courthouse and forced the closure of nearby beaches.</p> <p>As scattered storms swept across Belgium on Wednesday, one flooded parts of the historic town of Ghent following weeks of unrelenting drought.</p> <p>London and other parts of southern England were lashed with torrential rain and thunderstorms after one of the driest summers on record which gave the country its first-ever 40 degree Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) temperature last month.</p> <p>There was widespread flash flooding as the downpours fell on parched ground.</p> <p>Despite the rain, much of Britain is still officially in drought. Thames Water, which supplies 15 million people in and around London, says a ban on watering lawns and gardens will take effect Aug. 24.</p> <p>Much of Western Europe has experienced a season of extreme weather that scientists link to human-made climate change.</p>

	<p>Amid the storm warnings, French President Emmanuel Macron postponed an event Wednesday on the French Riviera to mark the 78th anniversary of a key Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France. It was rescheduled for Friday.</p> <p>The dramatic downpours put an end to weeks of historic heat that left much of France parched, rivers dry and dozens of villages without running water.</p> <p>Across much of Europe this summer, a series of heat waves has compounded a critical drought, creating prime wildfire conditions.</p> <p>Rainfall in recent days has eased the burden on firefighters facing France's worst fire season in the past decade, though emergency authorities said scattered wildfires continued to burn Wednesday in southwest France.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Fighting around nuclear plant fuels fears
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/worker-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant-warns-potential-catastrophe/story?id=88482895
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine -- As Russia and Ukraine trade accusations over attacks on Europe's largest nuclear power plant, a worker there told ABC News he fears not only for the safety of his family but also the world.</p> <p>"If something happens to the spent fuel storage, the consequences could be the same as Chernobyl," the worker, who spoke to ABC News on condition of anonymity, warned during an interview in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia on Tuesday.</p> <p>The Ukrainian man, who is an engineer at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant near the town of Enerhodar, said he plans to return to work soon out of a sense of duty to his country, despite his wife urging him to quit. He described how the Russian soldiers at the plant "are always armed and wear balaclavas."</p> <p>"If they don't like the look of you, they can yell at you," he said. "I've heard that some people were beaten."</p> <p>Shortly after invading neighboring Ukraine on Feb. 24, Russian troops stormed the Zaporizhzhia plant, on the banks of the Dnipro River in the country's southeast. The Ukrainian workers have been left in place to keep the plant operating, as it supplies electricity across the war-torn nation.</p> <p>"If everyone leaves the station, who will work there? We need to help Ukraine," the engineer told ABC News.</p> <p>However, heavy fighting around the site has fueled fears of a catastrophe, like what happened at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in northern Ukraine over 36 years ago.</p> <p>On April 26, 1986, a reactor at the Chernobyl plant, about 65 miles north of Kyiv, exploded and spewed enormous amounts of radioactive material into the atmosphere, forcing more than 100,000 people within a 1,000-square-mile radius to evacuate. It remains the world's worst nuclear accident.</p> <p>Russian forces seized the now-defunct Chernobyl plant and the vast, surrounding radioactive area soon after launching the invasion but ceded control of the facility to Ukrainian troops when they withdrew from the area at the end of March.</p> <p>Meanwhile, skirmishes between Russian and Ukrainian forces near the Zaporizhzhia plant caused a fire to break out at a training complex there in early March. On Aug. 5, shelling at the site resulted in several</p>

	<p>explosions near the electrical switchboard, causing a power shutdown, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the nuclear watchdog of the United Nations.</p> <p>Last week, IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi warned that the situation at the Zaporizhzhia plant has deteriorated rapidly to the point of becoming "very alarming" and the agency's technical experts must be allowed to visit the area to address mounting safety concerns.</p> <p>On Wednesday, in his nightly address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian troops must "immediately" withdraw from the Zaporizhzhia plant and nearby areas "without any conditions."</p> <p>"Any radiation incident at the Zaporizhzhia NPP can affect the countries of the European Union, Turkey, Georgia and countries from more distant regions. Everything depends solely on the direction and speed of the wind," Zelenskyy warned. "If Russia's actions cause a catastrophe, the consequences may also hit those who remain silent so far."</p> <p>The Ukrainian president also accused Russia of using "the cover of the plant" to launch strikes on nearby Ukrainian-controlled territories and storing troops, weapons and equipment in its facilities. Russia has denied the allegations and accused Ukrainian forces of repeatedly firing on the site.</p> <p>If shelling hits the spent fuel storage at the Zaporizhzhia plant, the engineer told ABC News "it might be like another Chernobyl," as radioactive material will leak and contaminate the environment.</p> <p>"Every day, the Russians come closer and closer to the unit, shellings are closer and closer," he said. "There is no order or stability."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Inflation takes a toll: retail sales flat in July
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/us-retail-sales-flat-july-inflation-takes-toll-88490041
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- The pace of sales at U.S. retailers was unchanged last month as persistently high inflation and rising interest rates forced many households to spend more cautiously.</p> <p>Retail purchases were flat after having risen 0.8% in June, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday. Economists had expected a slight increase in July retail sales.</p> <p>Still, Wednesday's report included some positive signs: Excluding autos and auto parts, retail sales rose 0.4% in July. And purchases of building supplies and garden equipment held up, as did sales at electronics and appliance stores.</p> <p>Lower gas prices likely allowed some shoppers to increase their purchases of other items. Gasoline sales plunged 1.8%, reflecting the drop in pump prices.</p> <p>"As gas prices fell, consumers had more money in their pockets for other items such as furniture and electronics," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist at LPL Financial.</p> <p>At the same time, consumers remained wary of spending much on non-essentials: Sales were down 0.5% at department stores and 0.6% at clothing stores.</p> <p>Compared with 12 months ago, overall retail sales were up 10.3% in July.</p> <p>America's consumers, whose spending accounts for nearly 70% of economic activity, have remained mostly resilient even with year-over-year inflation near a four-decade high, economic uncertainties rising and mortgage and other borrowing rates surging. Still, their overall spending has weakened, and it has shifted increasingly toward necessities like groceries and away from discretionary items like home goods, casual clothes and electronics.</p>

The government's monthly report on retail sales covers about a third of all consumer purchases and doesn't include spending on most services, ranging from plane fares and apartment rents to movie tickets and doctor visits. In recent months, Americans have been shifting their purchases away from physical goods and more toward services, like travel, hotel stays and plane fares.

Inflation continues to pose a severe hardship for many families. Though gasoline prices have fallen from their heights, food, rent, used cars and other necessities have become far more expensive, beyond whatever wage increases most workers have received.

Despite a still-robust job market, the U.S. economy shrank in the first half of 2022, raising fears of a potential recession. Growth has been weakening largely as a consequence of the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes, which are intended to cool the economy and tame high inflation.

The impact of the Fed's hikes has been felt especially in the housing market. Sales of previously occupied homes have slowed for five straight months as higher loan rates and high sales prices have kept many would-be buyers on the sidelines.

But the most important pillar of the economy — the job market — has proved durable. America's employers added a hefty 528,000 jobs in July, and the unemployment rate reached 3.5%, matching a near-half-century low reached just before the pandemic erupted in the spring of 2020.

As consumers have shifted their purchases more toward necessities, Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, on Tuesday reported sales and profit results that topped expectations. Walmart said more of its customers were favoring lower-priced grocery items.

But the company is benefiting from higher-income shoppers who have been trading down to Walmart to try to reduce their grocery bills. The company, long associated with price-conscious and lower-income consumers, disclosed that roughly 75% of its grocery sales last quarter were to households with incomes of at least \$100,000.

On Wednesday, Target reported that its profit plunged nearly 90%, despite solid sales, largely because it was forced to slash prices to clear heavy inventories of clothing, home goods and electronics. The retailer's stock tumbled on the news.

And last month, Best Buy, the nation's largest consumer electronics chain, cut its annual sales and profit forecast, saying inflation had dampened consumer spending on gadgets.

Still, as a whole, America's consumers have been showing the steady willingness to spend, thought at a more modest pace. Home Depot on Tuesday reported sustained demand among its customers for goods related to home improvement projects despite surging prices and mortgage rates for homes.

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HEADLINE	08/17 NHTSA: record high traffic deaths in 20yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/traffic-deaths-1st-quarter-2022-highest-20-years/story?id=88496475
GIST	<p>Traffic deaths for the first quarter of this year were the highest since 2002, according to early estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.</p> <p>The agency estimates 9,560 people died from motor vehicle crashes during the first quarter of this year -- up 7% from the same time in 2021.</p> <p>Traffic-related deaths have been on the rise since the onset of the pandemic. In 2019, NHTSA reported 36,355 people died on U.S. roads -- a number that grew to 38,824 in 2020 and 42,915 in 2021, despite less cars on the road.</p> <p>"The overall numbers are still moving in the wrong direction," said NHTSA administrator Steve Cliff.</p>

	<p>"We're talking about three years in a row of traffic deaths, not just being up but being up significantly," Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the non-profit Governor's Highway Safety Association said in an interview with ABC News.</p> <p>Adkins said the surge is due to multiple factors -- including less traffic enforcement on roads and prevalence of dangerous behaviors among drivers.</p> <p>"States are telling me all across the country that speeds are up, drivers are just continuing to speed," Adkins said. "We really need to bring some of the same attention to speeding that was brought to drunk driving and distracted driving. If we were to get drivers to slow down even a little bit, that make a big difference."</p> <p>Cliff said states should "double down" on traffic safety, saying, "Through the bipartisan infrastructure law, there are more resources than ever for research, interventions and effective messaging and programs that can reverse the deadly trend and save lives."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 WHO renames 2 monkeypox lineages
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/world-health-organization-renames-clades-monkeypox-virus/story?id=88491001
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization renamed the two known clades, or lineages, of the monkeypox virus Monday.</p> <p>Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the lineages will be referred to going forward using Roman numerals.</p> <p>"The clade formerly known as the Congo Basin or Central African clade will now be referred to as clade I, while the West African clade will be called clade II," he said during a news conference.</p> <p>Subsequent lineages will be named using Roman numerals for the clade and lowercase letters will be used for the subclade.</p> <p>The WHO has been in talks to rename the virus itself due to concerns about stigmatization.</p> <p>The decision Monday comes as an outbreak of monkeypox spreads around the world with more than 35,000 cases reported to the global health agency.</p> <p>In the United States, there are more than 12,600 cases across 49 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The majority of cases in the current outbreak have been reported during intimate contact among men who have sex with men, a group that includes people who identify as gay, bisexual, transgender and nonbinary.</p> <p>However, the CDC has warned that anybody is at risk of monkeypox infection if they have skin-to-skin contact with a monkeypox patient or make contact with an infected person's lesions.</p> <p>At least eight cases among children in six states and D.C. have been reported as well as one case among a pregnant woman.</p> <p>To avoid infection, the CDC recommends limiting the number of sex partners, avoiding spaces with intimate sexual contact with multiple partners, using condoms and gloves during sexual contact and being fully clothed when attending events such as festivals and concerts.</p>

	<p>Last week, researchers from Sorbonne University and Bichat-Claude Bernard University Hospital in France published a case report of a dog that developed monkeypox after being exposed to its owners, which were diagnosed with the disease.</p> <p>The CDC has since updated its website to state dogs can be infected by humans. It's unknown if other pets, such as cats, hamsters, gerbils and guinea pigs, can be infected.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Estonia: repelled major cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/estonia-says-it-repelled-major-cyber-attack-after-removing-soviet-monuments-2022-08-18/
GIST	<p>VILNIUS, Aug 18 (Reuters) - Estonia has repelled "the most extensive cyber attacks since 2007", it said on Thursday, shortly after removing Soviet monuments in a region with an ethnic Russian majority.</p> <p>Russian hacker group Killnet claimed responsibility for the attack, stating on its Telegram account on Wednesday it had blocked access to more than 200 state and private Estonian institutions, such as an online citizen identification system.</p> <p>However, an Estonian government official said on Thursday the impact of the attack was limited.</p> <p>"Yesterday, Estonia was subject to the most extensive cyber attacks it has faced since 2007", tweeted Luukas Ilves, undersecretary for digital transformation at Estonia's Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.</p> <p>"With some brief and minor exceptions, websites remained fully available throughout the day. The attack has gone largely unnoticed in Estonia," he added.</p> <p>Killnet, which claimed a similar attack against Lithuania in June, said it acted after a Soviet Tu-34 tank was removed from public display in the town of Narva to a museum on Tuesday.</p> <p>In a DDoS attack, hackers try to flood a network with unusually high volumes of data traffic in order to paralyse it when it can no longer cope with the scale of data requested.</p> <p>Estonia moved to boost cyber security in 2007 after suffering extensive attacks on public and private websites that it blamed on Russians angry at its removal of a Soviet-era statue.</p> <p>The Red Army monument was moved from a Tallinn square, followed by two nights of riots by ethnic Russians.</p> <p>The Estonian government on Tuesday ordered the swift removal of all public Soviet memorials in majority Russian-speaking Narva, citing rising tensions in the town and accusing Russia of trying to exploit the past to divide Estonian society.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Wipers expand beyond Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/fortinet-use-of-wipers-expanding-beyond-ukraine-to-24-countries/
GIST	<p>The use of wiper malware is increasingly expanding beyond the Ukraine conflict, according to research released today by cybersecurity giant Fortinet, with new variants popping up at an unprecedented rate.</p> <p>Wiper malware has been used heavily by hacking groups supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p>

Recorded Future's Insikt Group has [tracked nine different wipers](#) used in Ukraine, including WhisperKill, WhisperGate, HermeticWiper, IsaacWiper, CaddyWiper, and DoubleZero. Microsoft researchers [said in April that they had observed](#) nearly 40 destructive cyberattacks targeting hundreds of systems in Ukraine.

Fortinet security researcher Gergely Révay told The Record that wiper malware is increasingly reaching targets outside of Ukraine. While versions of wiper malware have previously been seen in [Ukraine](#), [Japan](#) and [Israel](#), it only recently became a truly global phenomenon. Révay said Fortinet detected wiper malware in 24 countries in the first half of the year.

"These wipers were not only related to the Ukraine war," Révay said, although many were. "We saw significant spillover from attacks against Ukraine. In many cases the main target was probably a Ukrainian organization, but due to the interconnectedness of the world, these attacks can easily affect other countries."

In the report released Wednesday, Fortinet researchers called the evolution in wiper usage "disturbing."

The group found at least seven major new wiper variants in the first six months of 2022 that were used in various campaigns against government, military, and private organizations.

That amount nearly equals the total number of variants that were publicly detected between 2012 and 2021.

"We are not aware that any of these recent wipers were used by cybercriminals or commercial hackers, but this is also expected," Révay explained.

"The 'problem' with wipers is that they are very difficult to monetize, since they are purely destructive and don't provide any leverage to the attacker over their victims."

Fortinet noted that the war in Ukraine has "fueled a substantial increase in disk wiping malware among threat actors primarily targeting critical infrastructure."

The company said the incidents were part of a broader increase in attacks on operational technology networks, which in 2022 faced several in-the-wild exploits on a wide range of devices and platforms.

The company suggested organizations have backups stored off-site and offline as one way to defend against wiper malware attacks.

In April, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [added several strains of wiper malware](#) to its advisory on tools used to attack Ukrainian organizations.

CISA and the FBI released the original advisory [in late February](#) and updated it on Thursday to add additional indicators of compromise for the [WhisperGate malware](#) and technical details for HermeticWiper, IsaacWiper, HermeticWizard and CaddyWiper destructive malware.

WhisperGate was used [during attacks on dozens of Ukrainian government websites](#) in January. It masquerades as ransomware but simply wipes infected devices instead of offering opportunities to pay a ransom.

There was international outcry in May when the United States and European allies [blamed Russia](#) for an "unacceptable" wiper malware attack on satellite internet provider Viasat in February.

In that attack, the AcidRain wiper malware was used to infect the company's KA-SAT satellite and disable the modems of tens of thousands of European customers. The incident also disconnected remote access to around 5,800 [wind turbines in Germany](#) that relied on Viasat routers for remote monitoring and control.

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SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/08/cybercriminals-developing-bugdrop.html
GIST	<p>In a sign that malicious actors continue to find ways to work around Google Play Store security protections, researchers have spotted a previously undocumented Android dropper trojan that's currently in development.</p> <p>"This new malware tries to abuse devices using a novel technique, not seen before in Android malware, to spread the extremely dangerous Xenomorph banking trojan, allowing criminals to perform On-Device Fraud on victim's devices," ThreatFabric's Han Sahin said in a statement shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>Dubbed BugDrop by the Dutch security firm, the dropper app is explicitly designed to defeat new features introduced in the upcoming version of Android that aim to make it difficult for malware to request Accessibility Services privileges from victims.</p> <p>ThreatFabric attributed the dropper to a cybercriminal group known as "Hadoken Security," which is also behind the creation and distribution of the Xenomorph and Gymdrop Android malware families.</p> <p>Banking trojans are typically deployed on Android devices through innocuous dropper apps that pose as productivity and utility apps, which, once installed, trick users into granting invasive permissions.</p> <p>Notably, the Accessibility API, which lets apps read the contents of the screen and perform actions on behalf of the user, has come under heavy abuse, enabling malware operators to capture sensitive data such as credentials and financial information.</p> <p>This is achieved by means of what's called overlay attacks wherein the trojan injects a fake lookalike login form retrieved from a remote server when a desired app such as a cryptocurrency wallet is opened by the victim.</p> <p>Given that most of these malicious apps are sideloaded – something that's only possible if the user has allowed installation from unknown sources – Google, with Android 13, has taken the step of entirely blocking accessibility API access to apps installed from outside of an app store.</p> <p>But that hasn't stopped adversaries from attempting to circumvent this restricted security setting. Enter BugDrop, which masquerades as a QR code reader app and is being tested by its authors to deploy malicious payloads via a session-based installation process.</p> <p>"What is likely happening is that actors are using an already built malware, capable of installing new APKs on an infected device, to test a session-based installation method, which would then later be incorporated in a more elaborate and refined dropper," the researchers said.</p> <p>The changes, should it become a reality, could make the banking trojans a more dangerous threat capable of bypassing security defenses even before they are in place.</p> <p>"With the completion and resolution of all the issues currently present in BugDrop, criminals will have another efficient weapon in the war against security teams and banking institutions, defeating solutions that are currently being adopted by Google, which are clearly not sufficient to deter criminals," the company noted.</p> <p>Users are advised to avoid falling victim to malware hidden in official app stores by only downloading applications from known developers and publishers, scrutinizing app reviews, and checking their privacy policies.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 USBs still major OT infection vector
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/usb-ot-infection-vector/

GIST	<p>Removable media represents the second greatest threat to operational technology (OT) systems so far this year, according to new data from IBM X-Force.</p> <p>The vendor analyzed its incident response and managed security services (MSS) data in light of the ongoing threat from Russia and a fast-expanding digital attack surface for many OT asset owners and operators.</p> <p>It revealed that phishing was the number one initial access vector for attackers in 2021, and was present in 78% of incidents analyzed over January-June 2022. However, tying for second place were scanning and exploitation of vulnerabilities and use of removable media (both 11%).</p> <p>IBM said that use of personal laptops by workers in the field often leads to infected USBs, which are then plugged into operator workstations.</p> <p>“Ideally, USB flash drives should be prohibited when possible,” the vendor argued. “If absolutely necessary, strictly control the number of portable devices approved for use in your environment and disable autorun features for any removable media.”</p> <p>The research highlighted other threats to OT environments. For organizations with OT monitoring tools installed, 57% of alerts concerned the continued use of the outdated and insecure TLS 1.0 encryption method.</p> <p>An additional 42% of OT alerts related to attempted and successful brute force attacks. The remaining 1% was accounted for by a variety of “enumeration alerts” including Modbus function code, illegal parameters and things like weak/default passwords on devices.</p> <p>Manufacturing was the most attacked sector in terms of OT threats in 2021, and it remains so this year, accounting for 23% of total incident response cases and 65% among OT industries in the first half of 2022, IBM said.</p> <p>Malicious spam (malspam) was flagged as the biggest OT threat so far this year, appearing in 44% of IBM engagements, with the majority of emails attempting to deliver the notorious Emotet Trojan.</p> <p>Remote access trojans (RATs) came in second at 19%, followed by ransomware (13%), business email compromise (BEC) and server access attacks (6% each).</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 CISA: flaws in Zimbra Collaboration Suite
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cisa-warns-hackers-vulnerabilities/
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has published a new advisory warning of threat actors actively exploiting five different vulnerabilities in the Zimbra Collaboration Suite (ZCS).</p> <p>The document was compiled in collaboration with the Multi-State Information Sharing & Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) and explains how threat actors may be targeting unpatched ZCS instances in both government and private sector networks.</p> <p>The first of the discovered vulnerabilities (tracked CVE-2022-27924) is a high-severity vulnerability enabling an unauthenticated threat actor to inject arbitrary memcache commands into a ZCS instance and cause an overwrite of arbitrary cached entries.</p> <p>“The actor can then steal ZCS email account credentials in cleartext form without any user interaction,” the advisory read.</p>

	<p>The second and third vulnerabilities mentioned in the document are chained (CVE-2022-27925 and CVE-2022-37042, respectively), with the former enabling an authenticated user to upload arbitrary files to the system, and the latter being an authentication bypass vulnerability.</p> <p>The remaining Zimbra vulnerabilities mentioned in the CISA report are CVE-2022-30333, a high-severity directory traversal vulnerability in RARLAB UnRAR on Linux and UNIX, and CVE-2022-24682, a medium-severity vulnerability that impacts ZCS webmail clients.</p> <p>All these vulnerabilities were disclosed to Zimbra and were patched by the company between May and late July. Despite this, CISA recommended administrators, especially those at firms that did not immediately update their ZCS instances upon patch release, hunt for malicious activity using third-party detection signatures mentioned in the advisory.</p> <p>Further, the document recommended organizations apply a number of best practices to reduce the risk of compromise, including maintaining and testing an incident response plan, ensuring organizations have a vulnerability management program, are properly configuring and securing internet-facing network devices and adopting zero-trust principles and architecture.</p> <p>CISA and the MS-ISAC said they will update the advisory to include additional indicators of compromise (IOCs) and signatures as further information becomes available.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 China-backed APT widespread espionage
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/china-backed-redalpha-apt-sprawling-cyberespionage-infrastructure
GIST	<p>The RedAlpha advanced persistent threat (APT) group, thought to be linked to the Chinese state, has been spying on global humanitarian, think tank, and government organizations thanks to a massive phishing campaign that's been active for years.</p> <p>That's the word from Recorded Future's the Insikt Group, which also found that the intelligence collection is likely used to support human rights abuses orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).</p> <p>RedAlpha (aka Deepcliff or Red Dev 3) specializes in mass credential-harvesting, which it accomplishes via convincing phishing emails with attached PDFs that lead to purported login pages. The group has been operational at a "high tempo" since at least 2015, Insikt researchers note, though it didn't spark the notice of security researchers until 2018. And since 2019, the activity has ramped up even further, analysts say.</p> <p>"Over the past three years, we have observed RedAlpha registering and weaponizing hundreds of domains spoofing organizations such as the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Amnesty International, the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), and other ... organizations," according to a blog post on Tuesday from Insikt. Last year, RedAlpha stood up at least 350 domains overall, representing a big spike in its activity, analysts said. In many cases, the observed phishing pages mimicked legitimate email login portals for these specific targets, suggesting the attackers intended to target individuals directly affiliated with the organizations, as opposed to using the branding of the entities to target other third parties.</p> <p>In particular, the APT has been observed directly targeting ethnic and religious minorities such as the Tibetan and Uyghur communities and protesters such as Falun Gong members, and it has been particularly interested in anything Taiwan-related. In short, the targets align closely with Chinese interests. Thus, the idea is to gain access to email accounts and other online communications of victims, in order to eavesdrop and gather political intel on the targets, researchers surmise.</p> <p>Casey Ellis, founder and CTO at Bugcrowd, says that the intel gleaned can be weaponized not just for guiding kinetic or physical strikes against the persons of interest but also for counter-messaging meant to undermine their activities.</p>

"China has an enormous population of very astute technologists, a vast security research and hacking community, and a large government-sponsored team with offensive capability ranging from information warfare to targeted exploit development and R&D," he says. "Data stolen for nation-state espionage isn't, for example, likely to be used for fraud if the threat actor is Chinese. The main threat, as is true for most nation-state threat actors, is dis/misinformation, weaponized memes, and subversive propaganda through social networks and traditional media."

The spoofing also has included impersonating well-known email service providers in an effort to look legitimate, including Yahoo (135 typosquatted domains), Google (91 typosquatted domains), and Microsoft (70 typosquatted domains).

"Chinese state-sponsored groups continue to aggressively target dissident and minority groups and individuals, both domestically through state surveillance and internationally through cyber-enabled intrusion activity," the researchers note. "This targeting of sensitive and vulnerable communities, many of which have security budget and resources constraints, is particularly concerning."

Sprawling Phishing Infrastructure

According to [Insikt's analysis](#), the group maintains large clusters of operational infrastructure, beyond the hundreds of phishing domains that imitate and spoof specific organizations.

The researchers say that other consistent characteristics of the group's efforts include the use of *resellerclub[.]com nameservers; using the virtual private server (VPS) hosting provider Virtual Machine Solutions (VirMach); similar domain-naming conventions, such as the use of "mydrive-", "accounts-", "mail-", "drive-", and "files-" strings across hundreds of domains; overlapping WHOIS registrant names, email addresses, phone numbers, and organizations; and the use of specific server-side technology components and fake HTTP 404 Not Found errors.

Phil Neray, vice president of cyber-defense strategy at CardinalOps, says that this kind of large footprint allows for significant espionage outcomes, which is one of the hallmarks of Chinese APTs.

"China has been a top nation-state threat for many years, given their strategic use of cyber-espionage to obtain expertise in key technologies such as biotech, semiconductors, defense, and energy, by stealing proprietary intellectual property from the West," he says. "They've also targeted PII in attacks against government organizations such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and large health insurance organizations like Anthem, which were two of the largest data breaches in history."

Phishing Is Phishing Is Phishing

The tactics in this case are tried and true, even if the perpetrators occupy "top-tier" status in the cybercrime pantheon.

"When it comes to phishing, threat actors at all levels generally rely on conventional aesthetic-based tactics to lure in their victims," Darren Guccione, CEO and co-founder at Keeper Security, tells Dark Reading. "Innocent people who are not trained on phishing prevention generally focus on the 'pinstripes' of the email. This means that the aesthetics they are familiar with, such as the logo and colors of a humanitarian, think tank, or government site, are used to lure them into a malicious link or form field."

It's important, however, not to underestimate the fallout from this familiar social-engineering approach.

"Cybersecurity threats which ultimately result in breaches due to weak passwords, stolen credentials, or phishing emails are pervasive," Guccione says. "They can have devastating and long-term adverse consequences, particularly when a broad-scope espionage campaign is used to support human rights abuses."

Any organization should bolster user awareness and employ basic defenses to avoid being on the hook from phishing, Guccione adds.

	<p>"We tend to believe what we see, which is why aesthetics and a compelling user interface often trump awareness of a nefarious and incorrect URL," he notes. "The key to training is to ensure users are checking that the URL matches the authentic website. A password manager that can automatically identify when a site's URL doesn't match is a critical tool for preventing the most common password-related attacks, including phishing and credential stuffing."</p> <p>CardinalOps' Neray adds that when it comes to civil-society targets specifically, "Organizations of all sizes must protect themselves by deploying continuous monitoring at all levels of their infrastructures — endpoints, network, cloud, identity — and ensuring they have SOC detection policies in place that match the latest adversary techniques employed by Chinese attackers, as documented in the MITRE ATT&CK framework."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Concern: UNC3890 targets shipping sector
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/risk/operation-sugarush-spy-effort-shipping-healthcare-industries
GIST	<p>A Persian-speaking threat group has been discovered targeting industries ranging from healthcare to energy, with a particular focus on the shipping sector.</p> <p>According to a report from Mandiant, which named the group UNC3890, the campaign uses email-borne social-engineering lures and a watering hole hosted on a login page of a legitimate Israeli shipping company to disguise the activity. While it targets mainly Israeli victims, the report advised that targets also include multinational companies, suggesting that the threat could have a global impact.</p> <p>Credential-stealing could allow the threat actor to gain initial access to a targeted organization for espionage purposes, according to the firm. For example, the credentials may allow the actor to connect to a victim's Office 365 mailbox and steal all the victim's email correspondence, thus gaining valuable insights about the victim and their organization's activity.</p> <p>"We observed the C2 servers communicating with multiple targets, as well as with a watering hole that we believe was targeting the Israeli shipping sector, in particular entities that handle and ship sensitive components," the report notes.</p> <p>Mandiant senior analyst Ofir Rozmann says the interest this actor shows in the shipping sector is most concerning, since the intelligence it gathers may be leveraged for more aggressive efforts, like kinetic warfare operations.</p> <p>"While we don't what exact data the attackers gained access to, compromising a shipping company's website and gathering intel on its users may have provided the attackers with data about cargo's contents, when it's being sent and its location over time," he explains. "This sort of data is important if Iran wishes to conduct kinetic operations targeting these shipments."</p> <p>Furthermore, this type of access may also be used to send phishing emails from within the organization, bolstering legitimacy and compromising more mailboxes and/or computers, or affecting downstream customers.</p> <p>A Taste for Custom Malware</p> <p>The group, which operates an interconnected network of command-and-control (C2) servers, spoofs legitimate services including Office 365, and social networks LinkedIn and Facebook, with phishing lures that include fake job offers and fake commercials for AI-based robotic dolls.</p> <p>Once a victim is compromised, the group delivers two proprietary pieces of malware, which Mandiant dubbed Sugarush and Sugardump.</p>

Sugarush is a backdoor that establishes a reverse shell over TCP to a hardcoded C2 address, according to the new analysis.

Sugardump meanwhile is used for harvesting credentials from Chrome, Opera, and Edge Chromium browsers, which can also exfiltrate stolen data via Gmail, Yahoo, and Yandex email services.

According to the report, several versions of Sugardump have been observed, with the first dating back to 2021, which stored credentials without exfiltrating them. Later versions use either SMTP or HTTP for C2 communications, and they have more advanced credential-harvesting functionality.

Other tools used by UNC3890 include Unicorn for PowerShell-type attacks, the Metasploit framework, and NorthStar C2, which is a publicly available open source C2 framework developed for penetration testing and red teaming.

"In addition, we identified an UNC3890 server that hosted several .ZIP files containing scraped contents of Facebook and Instagram accounts of legitimate individuals," the report says. "It is possible they were targeted by UNC3890, or used as lures in a social-engineering effort."

The group has been in operation since at least late 2020 and is currently perceived as an active threat.

Espionage for Many Outcomes

Rozmann adds intelligence collection is a key component of any state-sponsored activity since it can help keep the leadership and Iranian intelligence agencies informed when strategizing/making plans against their targets.

"While we believe this actor is focused on intelligence collection, the collected data may be leveraged to support various activities, from hack-and-leak to enabling kinetic warfare attacks like those that have plagued the shipping industry in recent years," according to Mandiant's analysis.

Whether it remains covert or is leveraged for more overt operations, the intel opens up options for a threat actor. For example, targeting the government sector may provide access to sensitive strategic, political, or defense-related data that can be beneficial for future negotiations, exposed/sold, or leveraged against the victims.

Attribution to Iran's Government?

While UNC3890 is almost certainly based in Iran, "we don't have enough evidence to determine whether this is a state-backed threat," Rozmann notes. "However, it is plausible, based on the actor's geographical focus, the targeted sectors and the focus on intelligence collection."

He adds that a typical cybercrime gang that's financially motivated would probably be interested in other information, such as bank accounts, and use other methods, such as ransomware attacks.

"Furthermore, it would target a broader spectrum of sectors and geographies in an effort to maximize potential profit," he says.

The United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have all recently warned that attacks from Iran-linked cyberattack groups have been [ramping up operations](#).

The Iranian state has been blamed for many prior efforts [targeting civilians in Israel](#), including attacks on water infrastructure and on an insurance company.

In June, Microsoft disabled the Iran-linked [Lebanese hacking group Polonium](#) after it discovered the threat actors abusing its OneDrive personal storage service. Among the targeted organizations were those involved in critical manufacturing, transportation systems, financial services, IT, and Israel's defense industry, the software giant says — all of which offered an avenue to carry out downstream supply chain attacks.

HEADLINE	08/17 Identity scams soar in 2021: new record
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/identity-scams-2021-record-year/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Google Voice scams led the way in what was a record year for identity-related fraud in 2021, according to the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC).</p> <p>The non-profit said it received 14,947 reports from consumers during the year, a 26% increase from 2020 and the most it has ever had to deal with.</p> <p>Half (50%) of these were scam victims: that is, they shared personally identifiable information (PII) with their attacker. More than half (53%) of this group comprised Google Voice scams, making it the most prevalent fraud type of the year.</p> <p>Fraudsters typically seek out victims who are selling items online. They will send them a Google verification code and request that the victim shares that code – ostensibly to verify they are a ‘real’ seller.</p> <p>In reality, if the victim does so, their phone number will be linked to a newly created fraudulent Google Voice account which will be used to scam others.</p> <p>Elsewhere, the ITRC recorded an 8% increase in “identity misuse” incidents, totalling 4168 in number. Two-fifths (40%) of these were related to financial account misuse, with most of this group linked to new account fraud (64%) and the remainder to account takeover (36%).</p> <p>Over half (55%) of identity misuse cases were recorded as attempts to open, access or take over government accounts or apply for benefits – no doubt spurred by the prevalence of COVID relief payments in the US.</p> <p>Elsewhere, the ITRC recorded massive rises in non-financial account takeover (235%) and social media account takeover (1044%).</p> <p>The non-profit said many of these were social media influencers lured into participation in Bitcoin investment scams, or claims they could increase the chances of their account being verified by Instagram. In both cases, they were asked to provide details which resulted in them being locked out of their account.</p> <p>ITRC CEO, Eva Velasquez, branded 2021 a record year for identity scams.</p> <p>“With high water marks for identity fraud, compromises and misuse, it’s important to take protective measures like freezing your credit, using strong 12+ character unique passphrases on all of your accounts and ignoring suspicious messages,” she advised.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 DarkTortilla crypter still threat evolving
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2022/08/17/darktortilla_crypter_malware_secureworks/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A highly pervasive .NET-based crypter that has flown under the radar since about 2015 and can deliver a wide range of malicious payloads continues to evolve rapidly, with almost 10,000 code samples being uploaded to VirusTotal over a 16-month period.</p> <p>Dubbed "DarkTortilla," the crypter usually delivers information stealers and remote access trojans (RATs) like AgentTesla, AsyncRat, NanoCore, and RedLine, though some samples have been seen delivering such targeted payloads as Cobalt Strike and Metasploit, according to researchers with Secureworks' Counter Threat Unit (CTU).</p>

It also can deliver add-on packages like other malware, benign decoy documents, and executables. DarkTortilla also comes with an array of controls designed to make it difficult for threat hunters to detect, analyze, and eliminate it.

"Researchers often overlook DarkTortilla and focus on its main payload," the CTU analysts wrote in a [report](#) released Wednesday. "However, DarkTortilla is capable of evading detection, is highly configurable, and delivers a wide range of popular and effective malware. Its capabilities and prevalence make it a formidable threat."

A crypter is software designed to [encrypt, obfuscate, and manipulate](#) malware to make it more difficult for security programs to detect it. According to cybersecurity vendor Trend Micro, cybercriminals use crypters to create malware that presents itself as a harmless program to get past security software and get installed in a targeted system. The crypters encrypt a malicious program and reassemble the code.

Normally crypters are sent via attachments in spear-phishing emails and spammed messages. Secureworks, reviewing VirusTotal samples, found "numerous campaigns" delivering DarkTortilla through spam emails are customized to the victim. The malicious payload comes in an attachment with a range of file types, from .zip and .iso to .img and .tar., according to the CTU, researchers, who have seen samples of the email written in English, German, Romanian, Spanish, and Bulgarian.

Rob Pantazopoulos, senior security researcher with the CTU, told *The Register* that it's unusual for malware like DarkTortilla to be active for so long and not be detected, but that it was helped by being among a number of generic .NET-based crypters, loaders, and droppers in the wild. In addition, many of these malwares are encoded using code obfuscators like ConfuserEX, DeapSea, and Eazfuscator.

"As a result, these crypters are often overlooked by security researchers in favor of their main payload given the high cost and low reward that reverse engineering the crypter would likely result in," Pantazopoulos said.

He suspects that the "next stage .NET dropper" and ".NET downloader" referred in a [report](#) last year by MalwareBytes analysts about a downloader they called "Saint Bot" were DarkTortilla's initial and loader and core processor components that were overlooked in the report.

MalwareBytes researchers also put out a report in 2015 about a new .NET encrypter that he said probably was an earlier instance of DarkTortilla based on some shared characteristics, including its .NET connection, an elaborate configuration, the ability to display a custom message box to the victim and anti-virtual machine and sandbox checks. More research is needed to further confirm any links.

DarkTortilla includes two components – a .NET-based executable as the initial loader and a .NET-base DLL as the core processor – needed to launch the malicious payloads. The initial loader decodes, loads, and executes the core processor, which then extracts, decrypts, and parses its configuration. It can also display the fake message box, checks for VMs and sandboxes, implements persistence, and processes add-on packages. The core processor then injects and executes the configured main payload and implements its anti-tamper controls.

The broad array of malware that it delivers gives CTU researchers a hint of how it's being used by cybercriminals, according to Pantazopoulos.

"Though we have yet to identify how and where this crypter is being sold, we suspect that it is being sold as a service," he said. "As a result, the threat actors and corresponding payloads associated with the crypter will vary wildly."

The number of DarkTortilla code samples loaded into VirusTotal between January 2021 and May 2022 is significantly higher than Pantazopoulos normally sees. In 365-day "retrohunts" in VirusTotal of a popular commodity malware family, CTU tends to see a couple of hundred up to 2,000 or so hits. During those 16 months, there was an average of 93 unique DarkTortilla samples a week.

Code similarities seen in DarkTortilla suggests possible links with other malware, including a crypter last updated in 2016 and run by the RATs Crew threat group, which was active between 2008 and 2012, as well as Gameloader, malware that emerged last year and uses similar malicious spam lures and also leverages .NET resources.

Despite being around for so long, DarkTortilla is still evolving.

"We know that the crypter is being actively developed given variations that we've seen with the initial loader," Pantazopoulos said. "Specifically, from roughly May 2021 to December 2021, DarkTortilla's initial loader had been changed to retrieve its encoded core processor from public paste sites [like Pastebin and TextBin]. Before and after this time period, the encoded core processes had been stored within the resources of DarkTortilla's initial loader executable."

CTU researchers have also seen minor changes made to the core processor DLL, including certain property names associated with parsing of DarkTortilla's configuration, he said.

Security pros need to pay attention to DarkTortilla due to its pervasiveness – as illustrated by the high number of code samples in VirusTotal – and its ability to evade detection, its configurability, and the wide range of popular malware it delivers. Because its primary payload is executed within memory, no evidence of the payload will be found on the filesystem, which Pantazopoulos said is a common technique for evading detection.

"The anti-tamper aspect to DarkTortilla ensures that it remains persistent in an environment," he said. "Through its elaborate configuration, DarkTortilla has versatility that similar malware does not. It can be configured with numerous payloads, supports multiple persistence types, is capable of displaying a customizable message box to the victim, and can migrate its execution multiple times during its initial execution."

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HEADLINE	08/17 BlackByte gang back: new extortion tactics
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/blackbyte-ransomware-gang-is-back-with-new-extortion-tactics/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The BlackByte ransomware is back with version 2.0 of their operation, including a new data leak site utilizing new extortion techniques borrowed from LockBit.</p> <p>After a brief disappearance, the ransomware operation is now promoting a new data leak site on hacker forums and through Twitter accounts the threat actor controls.</p> <p>The threat actors are calling this new iteration of their operation BlackByte version 2.0, and while it is not clear if the ransomware encryptor has changed as well, the gang has launched a brand new Tor data leak site.</p> <p>The data leak site only includes one victim at this time but now has new extortion strategies that allow victims to pay to extend the publishing of their data by 24 hours (\$5,000), download the data (\$200,000), or destroy all the data (\$300,000). These prices will likely change depending on the size/revenue of the victim.</p> <p>However, as pointed out by cybersecurity intelligence firm KELA, BlackByte's new data leak site is not correctly embedding the Bitcoin and Monero addresses that "customers" can use to purchase or delete the data, making these new features currently broken.</p> <p>The goal of these new extortion techniques is to allow the victim to pay to remove their data and for other threat actors to purchase it if they wish.</p>

LockBit introduced these same extortion tactics with the release of their [3.0 version](#) and are seen more as a gimmick than as viable extortion tactics.

Who is BlackByte?

The BlackByte ransomware operation [launched](#) in the summer of 2021 when the hackers began breaching corporate networks to steal data and encrypt devices.

Their highest-profile attack was [against the NFL's 49ers](#), but a [joint advisory](#) from the FBI and Secret Service says they were also responsible for attacks on critical infrastructure sectors, including government facilities, financial, and food & agriculture.

The threat actors are known to breach networks using vulnerabilities and in the past have [breached Microsoft Exchange servers](#) using the [ProxyShell attack chain](#).

In 2021, a flaw in the operation was found that allowed a [free BlackByte decryptor](#) to be created. Unfortunately, after the weakness was reported, the threat actors fixed the flaw.

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HEADLINE	08/17 Drop in ransomware numbers an illusion?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/17/is-drop-ransomware-numbers-an-illusion/
GIST	<p>For years, ransomware has been one of the chief scourges of cyberspace, robbing victims of billions, sparking panics for beef and gasoline and maybe even contributing to the death of a child.</p> <p>In recent months, though, tallies of ransomware — a kind of cyberattack where hackers encrypt a victim's system, then demand payment to unlock it — have shown signs of decline.</p> <p>So what's behind the diminished figures?</p> <p>The short answer is: It might be less about whether the number of attacks have fallen off, and more about whether the people who do the counting have less information about what's happening than before.</p> <p>If it's not an illusion, analysts can point to a host of potential factors explaining the drop. Either way, by no means do the numbers suggest ransomware is significantly less rampant.</p> <p>"Ransomware is still alive and well," Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at cybersecurity company CrowdStrike, told me.</p> <p>The numbers</p> <p>One of the first tallies pointing to a decline came last month from the Ransomware Task Force, made up of experts from government, industry, academia and nonprofits. It documented 64 attacks on local government, hospitals and schools in 2022 to that point, compared with 150 incidents from the same period last year.</p> <p>Also in July, SonicWall, NCC Group and GuidePoint Security pointed to decreases across the board, although the companies covered various time periods. Not all companies had identical conclusions. Ransomware incidents increased from the first quarter of 2022 to the second, Avast said last week. But even Avast had seen decreasing numbers from the end of last year and the beginning of this year.</p> <p>Cybersecurity company Secureworks also hadn't seen ransomware attacks rising in 2022 like it had in prior years based on the number of incidents it's responding to, Mike McLellan director of threat intelligence for the company's counter threat unit, told me. That there was a decline in the first few months of 2022 wasn't surprising, he said, because of seasonal patterns. But ransomware's stagnation in May, June and July compared with the same period last year was head-scratching, he said.</p> <p>Deceptive data?</p>

The Ransomware Task Force figures might be deceptive because they draw on data from ransomware gangs' leak sites, where they post alleged victims' identities and data in an attempt to compel them to pay, **Benjamin Freed** [reported for StateScoop](#). And ransomware gangs have relied less on those sites lately, with more directly contacting customers or others affected by the attack as a means of pressuring victims to pay the ransom.

Other developments could be distorting the numbers as well. Meyers said gangs have been using ransomware-like tactics without using the actual malicious software, stealing data and threatening to release it without necessarily locking up victim networks.

"What we're seeing is the evolution of ransomware into data extortion," he said. "We've seen some threat actors not using ransomware at all anymore, but they're still doing this data exploitation."

Another theory: Last year's high-profile attacks on Colonial Pipeline, [Kaseya](#) and beef supplier JBS might have pushed ransomware gangs to focus on smaller targets to avoid exacerbating the ire of policymakers and law enforcement, and that could distort the numbers in a different way.

"I have a concept that the bad guys are no longer going after large blue chips because of the backlash that can create," **Don Smith**, vice president of intelligence at the Secureworks Counter Threat Unit, told me.

"That then gives you a situation where, if you're a medium-to-large enterprise, you may not have a relationship with a national CERT," or government computer emergency response team, Smith said. "You may not be prepared to pay for top-tier incident response companies to help you with your problem. And therefore, from that sort of hilltop observation a lot of people may have reporting bias, which can explain this disparity."

In other words: Lower-tier victims might not be as likely to report their attack to anyone who keeps track of them. And [it might be a while](#) before legislation is translated into law that requires major system owners to report ransomware payments within 24 hours to the feds.

Attacks might actually have dropped

Sanctions against Russia, where many of the top ransomware gangs operate, [have hampered ransomware operators](#), National Security Agency Director of Cybersecurity **Rob Joyce** said in May.

Experts are divided on whether that's the case.

Other factors might be playing a role, too. After a particularly productive period, the prolific ransomware group [Conti apparently disbanded in May](#), following internal leaks that revealed the gang's inner workings.

The Russia-Ukraine war also could be preoccupying ransomware gangs in that part of the world, with some of them stating their allegiance to fighting on behalf of Russia.

Whatever the truth behind the numbers, ransomware doesn't look like they're dying off anytime soon.

"It's as troubling as ever," Smith said.

As the Ransomware Task Force observed about the apparent decline and its causes: "We will have a better picture of this as the year progresses."

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HEADLINE	08/17 Gen Z bypassing Google search for TikTok
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/gen-bypassing-google-tiktok-search-engine/story?id=88493981
GIST	NEW YORK -- The term "Googling" may be synonymous with "searching" for things online, but for the group known as Gen Z that might be changing.

Nearly 40% of Gen Z members (born from 1997 to 2012, according to [the Pew Research Center](#)) prefer TikTok for online searches, according to internal data from Google, which was [first reported by TechCrunch](#).

"They don't have a long attention span; they said that several times," said Adrienne Sheares, a social media consultant, who formed a Gen Z focus group to discuss their searching habits. "They want to get the information really quickly, and get to the meat of it really quickly and not have to sort."

Sheares said Gen Z was dissatisfied with the quality of Google's searches. That's in large part because the search engine forced them to sift through advertisements, which often comprise the first several results in common searches. Sheares said TikTok, by contrast, provides several avenues by which to quickly discover content.

"They use it a couple different ways," said Sheares. "So they could either be looking for it and search kind of similar to how you and I would search. But they also love the 'For You' page that kind of brings the results to them before they're even looking."

TikTok's "For You" page consists of a scrolling feed of videos that the app's algorithm has determined the user may be interested in. As such, searching via the "For You" page is more about discovering content, rather than looking for something specific. TikTok surfaces content based on a variety of factors, including how long a user lingers on a certain type of video, or whether they like or comment on it. Sheares said that algorithm is a big part of why younger users seem to enjoy searching for content on TikTok.

"The chances of [their results] being relevant are extremely high, so they can find information really quickly" she said. "Because if you're an avid user of TikTok, it knows quite a bit of information about you already."

Sheares also said TikTok's use of video is especially appealing to Gen Z users, who feel the format gives them a more comprehensive search result.

"You're seeing a three-sixty view into a destination, or experience, or product," says Sheares. "They wanted to see the makeup swatches; for bars, the thing they kept talking about was the aesthetic, the vibe."

Sheares also said Gen Z tends to search for lighter topics on TikTok - things like recipes, fashion tips and bar recommendations. Meanwhile, they leave heavier topics – like those related to COVID or election information - to Google.

"For the more serious information, they do like Google," said Sheares. "If they do see something on TikTok, they will use other methods to verify, which generally looks like going to Google or a news source to back it up."

The trend of using images and video in online searches could be here to stay. Earlier this year, Google showed off a new feature dubbed "Multisearch," which lets users search with a combination of text and photos.

"Even if people aren't interested in, say, TikTok, I think what we are going to start to see is more visual in search," said Sheares.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	08/17 How the ISIS Beatles were caught
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/08/17/how-the-isis-beatles-were-caught/

UK police have revealed the painstaking detective work and series of clues provided by freed captives that helped identify the mysterious gang of terrorists who became known as the [ISIS Beatles](#).

Police set out how they had to connect the dots between incidents that happened years apart and in vastly different geographical areas - one of which included an overheard conversation about an English Defence League demonstration on the anniversary of 9/11.

The [ISIS Beatles](#) carried out acts of brutality in the terror group's heartland in Syria before three were captured and one was killed.

[Alexanda Kotey was jailed in the US](#) in April for his part in the torture and murder of American hostages, while El Shafee Elsheikh will be sentenced on Friday over his role in the group.

Ringleader Mohammed Emwazi was killed in a drone strike in 2015 and Aine Davis was jailed in Turkey in 2017. Emwazi was identified by police as the masked man in videos showing hostages being murdered.

“This was a remarkable investigation where really determined and highly skilled officers and staff pieced together and unearthed tiny fragments of information gathered from isolated events that occurred years earlier and thousands of miles from where the offence took place,” said Commander Richard Smith, counter-terrorism chief at the Metropolitan Police.

“They were able to piece these fragments together and the sum of their parts was significant evidence which helped bring these men to justice.”

The investigation began in 2012, when British journalist John Cantlie and American photojournalist James Foley were taken hostage in Syria.

Police had no indication of who was behind it and interviewed released hostages who said the group apparently included men who were British citizens.

The group came to be known as The Beatles because of their British accents.

A “very significant” breakthrough came when a freed hostage told officers about hearing the men mention being arrested in the UK at an English Defence League counter-protest on the anniversary of 9/11.

Investigators looked into the clue and discovered that Kotey and Elsheikh had been detained in the area on September 11, 2011 — 10 years after the Al Qaeda attack on the US — at a Muslims Against Crusades counter-demonstration.

They were part of a group arrested on suspicion of involvement in a stabbing but were released without charge.

In 2014, messages from Elsheikh were discovered by police after a mobile phone belonging to his brother, Khalid, was seized in a firearms investigation. Pictures showed Elsheikh in combat gear and holding a gun.

“I would describe it as one of the most significant international terrorism cases we've ever seen brought to trial,” Mr Smith said of the ISIS Beatles case.

“The level of savagery in the propaganda videos described by the hostages who were held captive and subjected to physical assault was truly shocking.”

Police compared the footage with interviews held with him in the UK in 2012, while he was being questioned over a series of thefts, and matched his voice.

	<p>After Kotey and Elsheikh were captured, a case was pulled together by the Metropolitan Police and given to the attorney general, who authorised 139 charges, but the prosecution proceeded in the US.</p> <p>Kotey was sentenced on eight counts: four of hostage-taking resulting in death; conspiracy to commit hostage-taking resulting in death; conspiracy to murder US citizens outside of the country; conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, hostage-taking and murder, resulting in death; and conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation resulting in death.</p> <p>He was charged in relation to the killings of four US hostages: journalists Foley and Steven Sotloff as well as aid workers Peter Kassig and Kayla Mueller.</p> <p>Mr Smith added: "I'm delighted, in this case, to see that these two very evil men have been brought to justice."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Armed resistance against the Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgyw9a/afghanistan-taliban-resistance-panjshir
GIST	<p>Nestled in hideaways in remote valleys in Afghanistan and in safe houses outside the country, groups of armed militias are operating a growing resistance against the Taliban. These fighters, loyal to the previous Western-backed government, are running a sustained insurgency in areas already hostile to the Taliban.</p> <p>Eleven months after the Taliban claimed to have neutralised the final resistance fighters in the Panjshir Valley, and a year since the Kabul government fell to the Islamists, resistance fighters are regrouping.</p> <p>On Monday, the National Resistance Front – the biggest active anti-Taliban group – used the eve of the first anniversary of the fall of Kabul to announce a new wave of attacks on Taliban outposts in the north of the country.</p> <p>Several hit-and-run attacks on Taliban militants in the outposts and checkpoints in Andrab and Panjshir have already been reported, also in parts Baghlan, Parwan and Kapisa provinces, all of which are north of Kabul. Other small groups have also emerged in the south and east of the country.</p> <p>In a statement to mark the “fall of the regime” in Kabul, the NRF said the group would continue to “fight until the people of Afghanistan are liberated” from the Taliban.</p> <p>The NRF and other loosely allied groups have carried out a limited series of clashes in areas with large populations of ethnic and religious minority groups, known for their hostility to the Islamists, who target them with impunity.</p> <p>The Taliban have claimed that they have a diverse interim cabinet set up, but in reality the group has made very little effort to include ethnic and religious minorities, such as Tajiks and Hazaras, which has prompted a rebellion from people in minority regions.</p> <p>The Taliban dismiss the threat the few hundred armed men pose, and there is no doubt that the NRF has exaggerated its strength. But nevertheless, the number of propaganda posts by different insurgent groups has grown on social media. The groups include the Afghanistan Freedom Front in the north part of the country, and the Afghanistan Islamic National and Liberation Movement, which is made up of ex-security forces and has claimed responsibility for a dozen attacks in the south and east of the country since announcing itself in February.</p> <p>Much of the NRF’s leadership is based outside the country, settled in neighbouring Tajikistan after fleeing the Taliban advance toward the provincial capital of the Panjshir valley last year, the last anti-Taliban stronghold during the group’s takeover last year. Somewhere between 4,000 to 8,000 former Afghan army soldiers, police officers, and people allied to the groups that were in charge of Afghanistan have taken up arms in the Hindu Kush mountains.</p>

“Currently, there are many resistance groups. The National Resistance Front was the largest, most organised, and the first to emerge. However, in the following months and up to April 2022, numerous other fronts have emerged, mostly independent or based on ethnicity and geographical area,” said Daniele Garofalo, an expert in monitoring the propaganda of jihadist organisations, told VICE World News in an email.

The Taliban’s security forces are in control of every provincial capital across Afghanistan, and repeated reports show that they crack down harshly on any opposition in Tajik- and Hazara-majority areas. Most of the new resistance groups are made up of men in these persecuted ethnic minorities.

The NRF is led by Ahmad Massoud, the son of the legendary commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud who was known as the Lion of Panjshir. The young Massoud has repeatedly called for people to join in to fight against the Taliban despite being in Tajikistan. The group’s official website says that his front is fighting to “create a democratic system with elections, freedom of speech, human and women’s rights, inclusiveness of all ethnic groups in the government, fight corruption and terrorism.”

The resistance group claims to be a supporter of a “moderate Islam” and seek a “decentralised” system in Afghanistan that reflects the ethnic and religious components of the country.

“Massoud’s decision to organise a large council in which to unite the leaderships of all resistance groups and conduct a common, organised armed struggle with a single leadership could be decisive,” Garofalo said.

Last September, just weeks after the NRF was announced, the Taliban launched an offensive against the group. In 2021, for the first time in its history, the Taliban managed to take the capital of Panjshir – known for its ferocious anti-Taliban fighters – and announced the complete takeover of Afghanistan. The fighters, however, say they never surrendered.

The NRF has published a number of videos on social media with calls for Afghan people to join in the fight. They boast about their victories in media releases, but the Taliban outright deny any existence of any serious armed opposition.

The resistance groups are formed of supporters of the jihadi groups that fought the Soviets, and later allied with the US’s Nato-led campaign in Afghanistan. The ranks are also filled with former government security personnel laid off after the fall of Kabul, as the Taliban continue a harsh crackdown on any dissidents across the country.

The Western-backed government ran the country for two decades and was marred by overwhelming corruption, nepotism, and internal rivalries over lucrative contracts. Ultimately, it could not defend itself against the Taliban, which was emboldened by the sheer unpopularity of the official government.

The overall resistance to the Taliban since the Islamists has been disorganised, and their affiliations to the past Western-backed governments have not endeared them to all Afghans. The NRF leaders operate outside the country – mostly in neighbouring Tajikistan – and have not managed to create a united front. A number of other former prominent figures who fled the country have announced a Supreme Council for National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan from Turkey, mainly made of high-profile former warlords like Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammad Mohaqeq, Yunus Qanoni, Atta Mohammad Noor, and Ismail Khan. But the group is yet to show any signs of active military presence inside Afghanistan.

When anti-Taliban attacks in Andarab and Panjshir provinces intensified during May this year, the Islamists sent thousands of soldiers to regain control. Under the guise of search-and-destroy operations, dozens of men were rounded up. In one village in Panjshir, 80 men were detained and beaten by the Taliban soldiers who accused them of cooperating with the resistance groups. They kept 10 people in custody, claiming they were associated with armed groups entrenched in the far mountain peaks.

	<p>The Taliban has promised a general amnesty for former security forces, but the United Nations reported 160 extrajudicial killings and even more detention and disappearance of former government personnel in the past year. With the fear of getting killed at the hands of the Taliban, tens of former army soldiers joined the ranks of budding resistance groups. In June, Human Rights Watch released a report which found that the Taliban was using collective punishment and torturing residents accused of association with armed opposition groups.</p> <p>The limited number of clashes staged by resistance fighters is yet to prove a serious challenge to the Taliban's authority, but the Taliban is struggling to keep up with a growing number of attacks on the outposts and checkpoints across the country.</p> <p>The US and Western countries have so far distanced themselves from the resistance groups, even though they are led by their former allies.</p> <p>"The military part [of these groups] is made up of highly trained soldiers who are perfectly familiar with the territory in which they operate. They have made considerable progress in the last year," said Garofalo, the monitoring expert. "But they still need a lot of time."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Kabul mosque mass casualty explosion
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/huge-explosion-hits-kabul-mosque-many-casualties-feared-2022-08-17/
GIST	<p>KABUL, Aug 17 (Reuters) - A huge explosion struck a mosque in Kabul during evening prayers on Wednesday, witnesses and police said, with many feared dead or injured.</p> <p>Police said there were multiple casualties but did not say how many. One Taliban intelligence official told Reuters that as many as 35 people may have been wounded or killed, and the toll could rise further. Al Jazeera quoted an unidentified official as giving a death toll of 20.</p> <p>Kabul's Emergency Hospital said on Twitter they had received 27 patients wounded in the blast, including a seven-year-old child.</p> <p>Witnesses told Reuters the powerful explosion was heard in a northern Kabul neighbourhood, shattering windows in nearby buildings. Ambulances rushed to the spot.</p> <p>"A blast happened inside a mosque.... the blast has casualties, but the numbers are not clear yet," Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran told Reuters.</p> <p>The Taliban intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the explosion occurred in a mosque among worshippers in Khair Khana area of Kabul.</p> <p>The Imam of the mosque was among those killed and the toll could still rise, the source added. Intelligence teams were at blast site and investigations were ongoing.</p> <p>Other officials in the Taliban government did not reply to multiple requests to confirm the number of casualties.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	08/18 Minneapolis schools to layoff whites first
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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/minneapolis-public-schools-defends-policy-prioritize-retaining-educators/story?id=88491641
GIST	<p>Ahead of the new school year, Minneapolis Public Schools has defended its agreement reached with the teacher's union this spring to prioritize retaining educators of underrepresented backgrounds when determining layoffs.</p> <p>Effective in the spring of 2023, the contract provision states that teachers who are members of "populations underrepresented among licensed teachers in the district" may be exempt from district-wide layoffs outside of seniority order, deviating from the traditional "last-in, first-out" system.</p> <p>The stipulation is a part of a recent collective bargaining agreement between the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) and MPS, which concluded a weekslong teachers' strike in March.</p> <p>"To remedy the continuing effects of past discrimination, Minneapolis Public Schools and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) mutually agreed to contract language that aims to support the recruitment and retention of teachers from underrepresented groups as compared to the labor market and to the community served by the school district," a spokesperson for Minneapolis Public Schools said in a statement to ABC News Wednesday.</p> <p>The policy comes as efforts to diversify teachers in Minnesota are ramping up in the state legislature with the introduction of HF3079, the 2022 Increase Teachers of Color Act.</p> <p>The legislation seeks to "increase the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota" to ensure that "all students have equitable access to effective and racially and ethnically diverse teachers who reflect the diversity of students," according to the text of the bill.</p> <p>However, as news of the MPS policy has made national headlines in recent days, critics say the policy's attempts to rectify past discrimination could constitute discrimination itself -- potentially even a violation of the 14th Amendment.</p> <p>James Dickey, an attorney in Minneapolis, told ABC News that his firm has recently received a "flood of emails" from taxpayers and teachers in Minneapolis who are opposed to the policy and have reached out regarding potential legal actions.</p> <p>Dickey is senior legal counsel at the Upper Midwest Law Center, a nonprofit public interest law firm in Minnesota, and said that his firm could be "prepared to go forward with litigation" soon.</p> <p>When asked about efforts to diversify the teaching staff in Minnesota public schools, Dickey acknowledged the concern but said that addressing the issue instead requires reforming the seniority system, suggesting that layoffs should be based on merit, not seniority or race.</p> <p>"Teachers are not being evaluated based on merit, they're being evaluated based on, you know, first in first and last out. And I think that's the bigger problem," he said.</p> <p>Responding to criticism, MFT has doubled down on its support of the policy, citing the need for educators to reflect the diversity of their schools' student bodies. While 65% of the students attending MPS in the 2021-22 school year were people of color, only around 30% of the teaching staff were, the district reported.</p> <p>"No matter where they live in Minneapolis, or what they look like, every student in the Minneapolis Public Schools deserves great teachers and education support professionals who challenge, support and educate all their students in a safe and stable learning environment," the union wrote in a statement to ABC News.</p> <p>The union wrote that it wanted to create a "transparent, legal, ethical process" to retain the "unique skills and experiences" of educators of color and those of other underrepresented backgrounds in the case of budget cuts and layoffs.</p>

	<p>MFT described the agreement as a small step toward dismantling discriminatory systems in education but noted that diversifying educators will be a long haul given the nationwide teacher shortage. There are currently more than 370 open jobs for teachers in MPS, the union said.</p> <p>Tra Carter, a former behavioral specialist at Clara Barton Community School in south Minneapolis, said he believes MPS could do even more to support teachers of color. Carter, who was laid off last year during the strike, said that at the time, he was the only Black male educator employed at his school.</p> <p>"Black and brown educators of color are losing their jobs exponentially faster than their white counterparts, so I'm happy again that something got done," Carter said.</p> <p>"But I don't think that it's ever going to be enough," he added. "I think one of the first steps that the district needs to do is to begin hiring more educators of color and helping those educators that are already in the schools who don't have those teaching licenses or who don't have those degrees, helping those educators so that they can then be in that community."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Japan to young adults: drink more alcohol
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/18/japan-drinking-competition-alcohol-tax/
GIST	<p>Japanese officials, worried about shifting demographics and a sharp decline in sin tax revenue, have come up with an unusual fix for their fiscal woes: encouraging young people to drink more.</p> <p>“Sake Viva!” — a contest run by the nation’s tax agency — is calling on people aged 20 to 39 to come up with “business plans” to help revive Japan’s drinking culture, long an integral part of corporate life in the East Asian nation.</p> <p>The coronavirus pandemic exacerbated a decades-long decline in Japanese alcohol consumption, with residents eating and drinking out much less than usual. Although Japan never went into a full lockdown, a state of emergency was declared in Tokyo, with measures that included asking restaurants and bars to close early. At one stage during the pandemic, the sale of alcohol in restaurants was banned, while at other times it was restricted to certain hours of the day. While people drank more at home, overall alcohol consumption levels were lower than normal.</p> <p>Liquor tax revenue in the fiscal 2020 year was about \$8.4 billion, a plunge of more than \$813 million from the previous year, according to government data. That was the largest decline in three decades — and a cause for alarm for a government facing broad fiscal challenges.</p> <p>By 2020, alcohol consumption in Japan had fallen by about a third from the annual average of 26½ gallons per person in the mid 1990s, according to the country’s tax agency. Meanwhile, sales of nonalcoholic beverages — which aren’t subject to similar taxation — have grown in recent years, going by industry figures.</p> <p>As in many economically developed places around the world, younger Japanese people are drinking less than older generations. A 2019 health ministry survey found that 29.4 percent of people in their 20s don’t drink alcohol at all, while 26.5 percent said they rarely drink.</p> <p>The unorthodox push by bureaucrats to “revitalize the liquor industry” has faced a backlash on social media. No major Japanese alcohol manufacturers have publicly indicated their support.</p> <p>“Young people not drinking is a good thing. Why make them addicts,” one user wrote on Twitter, in a post that attracted hundreds of likes. Another wrote: “As long as they can collect taxes, I guess people’s health doesn’t matter.”</p>

	<p>The contest asks the participants to propose new ways to spur booze sales, including using artificial intelligence and tapping on the metaverse — the virtual universe that blends aspects of digital technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality. Entries close Sept. 9 and finalists will be invited to a tournament in Tokyo in November.</p> <p>It also calls for “new services and promotion methods” to stimulate demand among young people, and create products that take account of lifestyle changes brought on by the pandemic.</p> <p>The health ministry couldn’t immediately be reached for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 WSDA: massive moth spotted in Bellevue
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/life/animals/largest-atlas-moth-bellevue/281-01a642c7-364a-4415-a8d3-cac4c45ae2ff
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — A moth with 10-inch wings that is most commonly found in the tropical forests of Asia was discovered on a homeowner's garage in Bellevue, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).</p> <p>Washington entomologists have now turned to the public for help to get more information about this sighting. They want to determine whether this is a one-time escapee or if there is now an atlas moth population in the state.</p> <p>Anyone who thinks they spotted an atlas moth is urged to take a picture of it and send it to pestprogram@agr.wa.gov for identification.</p> <p>The atlas moth does not pose a public health threat, so they can be safely photographed, handled and collected.</p> <p>There have been no reports of atlas moths anywhere else in the country. However, if someone thinks they've seen it outside of Washington, they are also urged to take a picture of it, note the location, then report it to the State Plant Regulatory Official or State Plant Health Director in their state.</p> <p>The moth was initially discovered on July 7, then officially identified by a University of Washington professor on July 27.</p> <p>WSDA managing entomologist Sven Spichiger said he hopes the public will help with the research.</p> <p>“This is a ‘gee-whiz’ type of insect because it is so large,” Spichiger said. “Even if you aren’t on the lookout for insects, this is the type that people get their phones out and take a picture of – they are that striking.”</p> <p>There are some moth species that look similar to the atlas moth, according to WSDA. The main indicator will be the large size of the moth.</p> <p>August also happens to be National Tree Check Month. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and WSDA encourage Washington residents to check their trees, water features and other outdoor fixtures this month for invasive pests.</p> <p>In addition to the atlas moth, they say people should look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian Longhorned Beetle: This wood-boring beetle attacks many hardwood trees, including maples, birches and willows. • Asian Spiny Moth: Formerly known as the Asian gypsy moth, these insects lay dark brown egg masses on everything from tree trunks to lawn furniture. Many tree species are hosts to this insect,

	<p>which can completely defoliate trees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Emerald Ash Borer</u>: This small, green, wood-boring beetle is one of the most destructive forest pests in the U.S. Oregon confirmed the first sighting of this insect in the Pacific Northwest earlier this summer. • <u>Sooty Bark Disease</u>: There have been recent confirmed outbreaks from Bellingham to Olympia. Host trees include bigleaf maple, red maple, sycamore maple, and horse chestnut. • <u>Spotted Lanternfly</u>: This insect feeds on sap from many tree species, including those that grow fruits such as apples, cherries, grapes and plums. It also feeds on hops.
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	08/17 Tacoma: 3 shot during music video filming
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/3-shot-including-2-year-old-child-during-filming-music-video-tacoma/5NPMQVIZUJFLHCXCCW3GMBZ34Q/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police say a 2-year-old girl was hurt after getting caught in the crossfire of a shooting on Tuesday night.</p> <p>Police responded to reports of gunfire in the 1300 block of South 8th street at about 11:30 p.m.</p> <p>Upon arriving at the scene, an officer was stopped by a woman holding her two-year-old daughter, who had been shot in the finger.</p> <p>The officer immediately transported the woman and her child to a hospital, where she was treated for non-life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>Witnesses told police that a group of people was filming a music video when a separate group drove up and attempted to rob the victims.</p> <p>The victims then ran into a home where multiple shots were fired inside.</p> <p>Two adult men connected to this incident were later treated at a hospital for non-life-threatening gunshot wounds.</p> <p>Both men have been contacted by police.</p> <p>This is an ongoing investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Tacoma bank customer shot drive-thru ATM
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/bank-customer-in-tacoma-shot-during-robbery-at-branch-atm-police-say
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Police were searching for the suspect who shot a bank customer in Tacoma on Wednesday while he was attempting to use the branch's drive-through ATM, police said.</p> <p>The 39-year-old man, who was not identified, was taken to a local hospital for treatment of a non-life-threatening injury, investigators said in a written statement. Information about the victim's condition was not immediately released.</p> <p>Police were called to the Wells Fargo bank, located at S. 54th Street and Pacific Avenue about 4:45 p.m.</p>

	<p>The victim told police he was in his car when a suspect walked up to his vehicle and demanded the man's wallet. After taking the man's wallet, the suspect fled and the victim began reversing the vehicle toward the suspect who opened fire, police said.</p> <p>Police said one bullet struck the man's car and another bullet grazed his abdomen.</p> <p>Video of the scene showed several police officers searching for clues in the bank parking lot.</p> <p>The back window of the victim's station wagon appeared to have shattered after being struck by a bullet.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/18 Mexico citizens caught in cartels crossfire
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/18/mexico-drug-cartels-violence-civilians
GIST	<p>For Carlos Holguín it was supposed to be just another day of toil.</p> <p>After leaving the factory where he works morning shifts in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juárez, the 24-year-old began his nightly routine last Thursday as a food app delivery driver.</p> <p>Holguín was collecting a pizza when something hot pierced his left foot. Seconds later he saw people running for their lives. Still unsure what was happening, the delivery driver – who has a hearing impairment – threw himself to the ground as two more bullets struck his legs.</p> <p>“When my mother got to the pizzeria he was lying there ... groaning, covered in blood, and had been shot three times,” said his brother, César Holguín, 27.</p> <p>“Unfortunately, we live in a city and a country under assault from organised crime,” Holguín said – as Mexico came to terms with the latest explosion of bloodshed in its traumatic modern history.</p> <p>The shooting in Ciudad Juárez came during a headline-grabbing week of violence that paralysed some of Mexico’s most important cities, left more than a dozen people dead and raised fresh questions over the security policies of Mexico’s nationalist president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador.</p> <p>The mayhem began on 9 August, when security forces reportedly tried to arrest a senior leader from the country’s most notorious organised crime group, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. The response from Jalisco hatchet men was fast and furious: in a series of brazen strikes they torched buses, cars and dozens of convenience stores as they rampaged across central cities such as Guadalajara, Guanajuato and León.</p> <p>Forty-eight hours later the violence spread north as rival gangsters clashed in a prison in Ciudad Juárez, just over the border from El Paso, Texas.</p> <p>The violence, seemingly unrelated to the havoc in Jalisco and Guanajuato, soon spilled beyond the prison’s walls as cartel gunmen hit a series of civilian targets, including the Little Caesar’s pizzeria where Holguín was picking up an order.</p> <p>“Terror,” one Mexican journalist tweeted alongside graphic security footage of the moment police entered the bullet-riddled restaurant to find the floor smeared with blood.</p> <p>The next day, Tijuana, roughly 20 miles (32km) over the border from San Diego, found itself at the eye of the storm, with its usually bustling streets emptying as bandits erected roadblocks and burned dozens of vehicles.</p> <p>“They are literally torching our the country,” tweeted the newspaper editor Adrián López, who said the direct targeting of civilians was unprecedented.</p>

López Obrador, who was elected in 2018 promising to “pacify” his troubled nation with a controversial policy of “hugs, not bullets”, claimed the attacks suggested those efforts were succeeding. He called the violence desperate cartel “propaganda” designed to project a false sense of power.

“I want to tell the people of Mexico to remain calm,” said the president, who is known as Amlo, accusing conservative political rivals of “magnifying” the turmoil.

Yet the scale of the violence needed no amplification and offered a terrifying reminder of the muscle of wealthy and heavily armed groups such as the Jalisco cartel and the government’s inability to respond, even in major cities.

While Holguín was being taken to hospital in Ciudad Juárez, another civilian, 22-year-old Jovanni Varo, was gunned down while leaving a bank with his girlfriend.

“They went to withdraw some money for the week and were walking out when Jovanni just shouted at her, ‘Run!’” said the victim’s mother, Candelaria Varo. “When she turned around she saw he was injured and within seconds he was dead,” she added.

The security specialist Óscar Balderas said that far from being an isolated event, the wave of violence was the result of an ill-conceived security strategy still based on [catching senior cartel leaders](#) without targeting the finances or assets of their groups.

“Drug cartels are less and less drug cartels and increasingly criminal enterprises,” Balderas said. “Rather than simply arresting criminal operators, these [police] operations need to be closing bank accounts, seizing property, confiscating buildings and weapons, above all high caliber ones, that only the army is allowed to use.”

Mexico’s defense secretary, Luis Cresencio Sandoval, has defended his government’s tactics, calling the attacks a counteroffensive against growing government pressure, including the deployment of hundreds of members of the national guard and a series of major operations and arrests. The defense chief claimed increasingly frail organised crime groups wanted to show strength, “when in reality these underworld structures are being gradually eroded”.

Yet experts are unconvinced by such claims, with Balderas one of many to question the government’s strategy. “An operation’s success is being gauged by the number of people arrested when this is actually a very poor indicator,” he said.

López Obrador’s government has made some significant arrests in its anti-cartel crusade but such operations have not always gone to plan.

In October 2019, the son of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, was briefly detained in Culiacán but then [freed on the president’s orders](#) after cartel gunmen [brought the city to a standstill](#) with a wave of attacks.

The 9 August attacks that sparked Mexico’s recent week of violence came as authorities attempted to seize Ricardo Ruíz Velasco, a Jalisco cartel founder nicknamed Double R who is close to the group’s notorious leader, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, El Mencho.

Balderas said such outcomes highlighted the lack of operational intelligence and political will when it came to fighting organized crime. Examples of success included the July arrest of [the legendary drug boss Rafael Caro Quintero](#) and the 2020 capture of the leader of the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel, [El Marro](#).

“But beyond that operations have been sloppy, unconvincing and based on scant criminal intelligence ... simply responding to occasions when [criminals] are caught red-handed,” Balderas added. “This prevents intelligence-based operations and leads to the dire results we have seen in the streets [recently].”

Mexico's political opposition has called the August attacks acts of terrorism and alleged Amlo's government is losing control of the country.

But Balderas questioned that definition: "Terrorist groups seek to destroy the state in order to establish its own regime, while Mexico's criminal groups – criminal enterprises such as the Northeast cartel, the Jalisco cartel or the Michoacán Family – seek not to govern but rather ... to take advantage and join forces with the state."

However the violence is defined, the human consequences have proved devastating.

"We didn't ask for this situation, it isn't fair," said César Holguín, who said the long-term extent of his brother's injuries remained unclear.

"My brother is a decent person who supports his family and two daughters," he said. "He didn't deserve this."

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HEADLINE	08/17 Rushdie attacker praises Iran ayatollah
SOURCE	https://nypost.com/2022/08/17/alleged-salman-rushdie-attacker-didnt-think-author-would-survive/
GIST	<p>The New Jersey man who allegedly stabbed Salman Rushdie in Western New York last week praised Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in an exclusive jailhouse interview with The Post on Wednesday — and admitted he didn't think the author would survive the attack.</p> <p>"When I heard he survived, I was surprised, I guess," Hadi Matar, of Fairview, NJ, said in a video interview from the Chautauqua County Jail.</p> <p>The 24-year-old was mum on whether he was inspired by the late Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issuing a fatwa, or edict, calling for Rushdie's death in 1989 over the author's book "The Satanic Verses," citing a warning by his defense attorney.</p> <p>"I respect the ayatollah. I think he's a great person. That's as far as I will say about that," Matar said, noting he only "read like two pages" of Rushdie's controversial novel.</p> <p>"I read a couple pages. I didn't read the whole thing cover to cover," he said.</p> <p>The accused stabber denied being in contact with Iran's Revolutionary Guard and alluded to acting completely alone.</p> <p>He said he was inspired to go to Chautauqua after seeing a tweet sometime in the winter announcing Rushdie's visit.</p> <p>"I don't like the person. I don't think he's a very good person," he said about Rushdie. "I don't like him. I don't like him very much.</p> <p>"He's someone who attacked Islam, he attacked their beliefs, the belief systems."</p> <p>The 75-year-old India-born writer, who has faced death threats for decades over the novel which some Muslims believed insulted the Prophet Muhammad, was attacked on stage Friday as he was preparing to deliver a lecture on artistic freedom at the Chautauqua Institution.</p> <p>Rushdie — who previously spent years in hiding because of the \$3 million Iranian bounty on his head — was stabbed at least 10 times, suffering a damaged liver and severed nerves in an arm and an eye, according to his literary agent Andrew Wylie. He's since been taken off a ventilator and is said to be "on the road to recovery."</p>

A New York state trooper assigned to Friday's event took Matar into custody almost immediately after the attack. Matar was charged with attempted murder and assault and pleaded not guilty through his attorney at a court hearing Saturday.

During the approximately 15-minute-long interview Wednesday, Matar wore a black and white prison jumpsuit and a white cloth mask. He looked down at times and spoke in a flat tone.

He described how he took a bus from New Jersey to Buffalo the day before the attack, and then grabbed a Lyft to Chautauqua.

"It's a nice place," he said, referring to the bucolic nonprofit that turned into a site of terror Friday.

"I was hanging around pretty much. Not doing anything in particular, just walking around," he added, saying he slept in the grass outside Thursday night. "I was just outside the whole time."

While less familiar with Rushdie's written work, Matar said he watched videos of the author on YouTube. "I saw a lot of lectures," he said. "I don't like people who are disingenuous like that."

Matar, who was born in the US to parents from southern Lebanon, did not respond to questions about a monthlong 2018 trip to the Middle Eastern country to visit his father, as reported by the Daily Mail.

His mother, who has disowned Matar over the alleged assault, [said the visit "changed" him](#) and that he became more religious and isolated himself in her basement after returning.

"I was expecting him to come back motivated, to complete school, to get his degree and a job. But instead he locked himself in the basement," mom Silvana Fardos told the Mail. "He had changed a lot, he didn't say anything to me or his sisters for months,"

Matar said he'd worked at a Marshalls in Edgewater in the fall for two months, but spent most of his time in his mom's basement "using the internet, playing video games, watching Netflix, stuff like that."

"I wanted a hobby, a recreational activity," he said about his boxing gym in New Jersey.

Matar said little else about Rushdie specifically but complained about conditions in the jail, where he is being held without bail. "A lot of the food they have given me is not allowed in my religion to eat," he said, adding that despite that, he is "doing all right."

The Chautauqua County District Attorney's Office said Wednesday that Matar may have a court appearance Thursday. He also has a preliminary hearing scheduled for Friday.

During Matar's arraignment Saturday, Chautauqua County DA Jason Schmidt described the stabbing as "a targeted, preplanned unprovoked attack on Mr. Rushdie."

Matar "didn't bring a wallet. He had cash, prepaid Visa cards with him. He had false identification with him," Schmidt said.

The prosecutor told Judge Marilyn Gerace that Rushdie suffered three stab wounds to the right side of his neck; four in the stomach; a puncture wound to his right eye, which he may lose; two puncture wounds to his chest; and a laceration to his right thigh.

Matar is being held without bail, in part because prosecutors feared he would be awarded a bounty for the attack.

"Even if this court sets a million-dollar bail, we stand a risk that this bail could be met because of that," Schmidt said.

	<p>Khomeini's 1989 fatwa called on his followers to kill anyone involved in the publication of Rushdie's book, "The Satanic Verses."</p> <p>In 1991, Hitoshi Igarashi, the novel's Japanese translator, was stabbed to death outside of his office at Tsukuba University.</p> <p>That same month, Ettore Capriolo, the book's Italian translator, was stabbed at his home in Milan. Capriolo survived the attack.</p> <p>In 1998 Iranian officials tried to distance themselves from the fatwa. But anti-Rushdie sentiment has reportedly remained high in Iran, and some organizations have continued to call for his death.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Parole last man largest US mass kidnapping
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/17/us/frederick-woods-chowchilla-kidnapping-parole/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Frederick Woods was 24 years old in 1976 when he and two other men kidnapped a bus full of children in northern California in what would become the largest mass kidnapping in US history.</p> <p>Now 70, Woods is set to become a free man after he was granted parole Tuesday, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.</p> <p>Woods was originally found suitable for parole in March, but Gov. Gavin Newsom referred the decision for review by the full parole board, said CDCR Deputy Press Secretary Terry Thornton. During the review Tuesday, the board affirmed the hearing panel's decision to grant parole, Thornton said.</p> <p>Woods and brothers Richard and James Schoenfeld pleaded guilty to kidnapping 26 children and their bus driver in Chowchilla, California, more than 45 years ago.</p> <p>The children, ages 5 to 14, and their bus driver were driven about 100 miles to a remote quarry near Livermore, California, where the kidnappers ordered their victims into a moving van buried six feet underground.</p> <p>The kidnappers demanded \$5 million ransom as their victims were held in deplorable conditions, with the stench of vomit and filth intensified by the searing California heat.</p> <p>After 16 hours underground, the driver and children dug themselves out and escaped as the kidnappers were asleep.</p> <p>Woods and the two brothers were each given 27 sentences of seven years to life in prison without the possibility of parole.</p> <p>An appeals court later overturned the sentence, saying the men caused no serious bodily injury and therefore should have the chance for parole.</p> <p>Richard Schoenfeld was paroled in 2012. His brother James was released in 2015.</p> <p>Dominique Banos, an attorney for Woods, said she is "elated" by the board's decision to grant him parole, which she said was the result of Woods' "record of demonstrated remorse, participation in self-help & therapy, and consideration of public comments from members of the public who strongly support his release."</p> <p>"In sum, Mr. Woods has shown a change in character for the good, great maturity, insight and remorse for the arrogance and poor choices he made nearly 50 years ago," Banos said in a statement.</p> <p>The corrections department did not disclose when Woods will be released "due to safety and security concerns," Thornton said.</p>

HEADLINE	08/17 Police investigate Black separatist group
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-investigation-focused-on-black-separatist-group/
GIST	<p>FAYETTEVILLE, Ga. (AP) — A Georgia-based Black separatist group is being investigated by federal and local authorities for a range of possible criminal offenses including drug and gun offenses, kidnapping and human trafficking, a detective testified Tuesday in a court hearing in suburban Atlanta.</p> <p>The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports Fayetteville Police investigator Diana Snider testified in magistrate court that she began investigating the Black Hammer Party after the group moved its headquarters to the town south of Atlanta. She said she was contacted by the FBI, which she said is also investigating.</p> <p>Two members of the group have been charged with felonies relating to an alleged kidnapping and sexual assault in July at the house the group rents in Fayetteville.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the FBI's Atlanta office declined to comment citing the agency's policy not to comment on ongoing investigations.</p> <p>A federal indictment unsealed last month in Tampa, Florida, alleges the group is involved in an effort by a Russian citizen with Kremlin connections to sow discord in the United States by paying fringe groups to make political protests. The indictment includes groups in Florida and California, as well as the Black Hammer Party, as unindicted co-conspirators to the plot.</p> <p>Snider said federal agents have been watching the group's attempts to recruit and arm homeless men as a security force and to aggressively solicit college students for donations at a downtown Atlanta park.</p> <p>No criminal charges have been brought regarding those activities, the newspaper reported that Snider testified. Tuesday's hearing relates to a July 19 call to police from a person who claimed he was kidnapped and held at gunpoint in a locked garage at the Fayetteville house.</p> <p>Black Hammer leader Augustus Claudius Romain Jr., 36, known as Gazi Kodzo and a top lieutenant, 21-year-old Xavier "Keno" Rushin, were charged with kidnapping, aggravated assault, false imprisonment, conspiracy to commit a felony, and taking part in street gang activity.</p> <p>Romain was also charged with forcible sodomy. Snider testified that Romain required group members to have sex with him to advance within the Black Hammer Party.</p> <p>Prosecutors dropped conspiracy charges Tuesday. Magistrate Judge Christy Dunkelberger ruled there was enough evidence to advance the other charges to trial. Romain and Rushin remain jailed without bail.</p> <p>Defense attorneys for Romain and Rushin on Tuesday questioned the information underlying the arrests and asked how a political party qualifies as a street gang. The group claims it's being targeted by federal authorities for political activities.</p> <p>The alleged victim of the sexual assault declined to speak to police at the time of the arrests and the alleged kidnapping victim who called police is homeless.</p> <p>"This entire case appears to arise on the statement of one person," said Stacey Flynn, the lawyer for Romain, referring to the man who called police.</p> <p>Fayetteville detective Justin Taylor said the man told police he and another Black Hammer recruit had been forced into a locked garage and held at gunpoint when the victim refused Romain's order that everyone go to bed at 8 p.m. because the group had a protest the next morning. Taylor testified Romain and another Black Hammer member, 18-year-old Amonte "AP" Adams, held guns.</p>

	<p>Adams was found inside the house when police raided, dead of from what police said appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The Black Hammer Party has, without evidence, accused police of shooting Adams. Taylor said an autopsy of the man has been completed, but a report is not yet available.</p> <p>Snider said police and the FBI are investigating three other kidnappings that are alleged to have occurred in the house.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Rewards for info: crimes targeting women
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/crime-stoppers-offers-rewards-for-crimes-targeting-women
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - It's no doubt crime is rising in nearly every part of Puget Sound, including a pair of incidents where local law enforcement need help identifying criminals focusing women as their targets.</p> <p>First in the South Sound, police are on the hunt for a trio accused of accosting victims at gunpoint while pulling cash at ATMs. Then, Seattle Police need your help identifying an especially violent man who targeted a woman as she walked into the secure section of her Central District neighborhood apartment.</p> <p>The incident in the Central District happened at the end of May at an apartment building on S Jackson Street. Police say the woman was strolling into the lobby with takeout food, but was brutally assaulted before she ever made it home.</p> <p>Seattle Police say a man somehow was able to rip open a locked door, and was then seen in surveillance video heading straight toward his unsuspecting victim. Without a pause, the suspect violently assaulted her, striking her head repeatedly before simply walking away.</p> <p>Seattle Police say the assailant is a white man with a short, buzzed hair cut standing between 5'6" and 5'10" tall. He was seen wearing a camouflage shirt or jacket over a white t-shirt. Detectives think his hunched posture might be the key that helps the public identify him.</p> <p>"It's horrible, this guy needs to go to jail," said Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound director Jim Fuda.</p> <p>Fuda has been around law enforcement for decades, and he called the attack in Seattle especially heinous. "It's absolutely brutal. An unprovoked attack to where he beats her that she has broken bones in her face and a concussion, it's horrible," he said.</p> <p>Now to the South Sound, where images released by the Fife Police Department show two suspects part of a trio targeting a woman who pulled up to an ATM in early August. They stopped her at gunpoint then took over her transaction, stealing hundreds from her account.</p> <p>The woman ran away for safety.</p> <p>Fife Police believe the trio may be responsible for similar armed robberies in not only Fife but also Parkland, Bonney Lake, Puyallup, Federal Way, Kent and potentially Seattle.</p> <p>"A lot more inquiries and more registrations to our upcoming classes," said Mark Vinci who runs Model Muggings.</p> <p>His program is returning to Seattle post-COVID, and it helps women learn self-defense.</p> <p>Vinci says more women are reaching out to fill a class scheduled for this weekend in the Puget Sound area.</p> <p>The brutal violence caught on camera in Seattle back in May highlights the violence seen in Washington and elsewhere that Vinci says is pushing more clients to reach out to learn how and when to fight back.</p>

	<p>"It's pretty violent and intense," Vinci said. "It could have been worse, fortunately for her, it wasn't."</p> <p>Crime Stoppers is offering reward for information in both of the cases. Tipsters can remain anonymous with calls to 1-800-222-TIPS or using the P3 Tips app.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Bottlenecks still letting criminals go free
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/crime-report-shows-big-improvements-bottlenecks-still-letting-criminals-go-free/T5WJUT6WNNDGVM63PQVEYL3CCU/
GIST	<p>The Seattle city attorney's office is making major headway on the backlog of thousands of misdemeanor criminal cases that built up during the pandemic. But there are still major bottlenecks in the system -- meaning some criminals end up going free.</p> <p>A new Quarter 2 Crime Report released on Wednesday shows several areas of improvement. The numbers shared by City Attorney Ann Davison's office show they have dramatically reduced how long victims must wait for justice. Her office processes misdemeanor cases like theft, non-felony assaults and DUIs, and domestic violence cases, to name a few.</p> <p>The report says it used to take about 124 days for prosecutors to decide whether they were going to charge someone in a case or drop it.</p> <p>"What does that message say to victims? What happened to you didn't matter," Davison said. She said now their team has managed to drop the wait time to about three days.</p> <p>"Our public safety system at the misdemeanor level has to function. And that's what we're doing," she said.</p> <p>But, there are still big challenges.</p> <p>Data shows the number of cases Seattle Police send over to the prosecutor's office each quarter has dropped by about 1,000. Back in 2018, the SPD was referring about 3,800 cases every quarter. Now that's about 2,800.</p> <p>And the report acknowledges that some crimes like "thefts are likely heavily underreported compared to assaults given the staffing challenges at SPD."</p> <p>The report also says more DUI cases are getting declined, "potentially because of large delays at the state toxicology laboratory" that has a massive backlog.</p> <p>"When there are obstacles like that, we just have to figure out what methods can we do. So there are other methods to pursue DUIs and we just go back to the books and do what was done beforehand, making sure our prosecutors are well-trained in pursuing alternatives," Davison said.</p> <p>And the city attorney's office is working to chip away at its own backlog cases that swelled to about 5,000 cases during the pandemic. Davison took office in January and ran on a pledge to clear those cases.</p> <p>She says now her team has cleared about 20% of that, but some cases just couldn't be prosecuted.</p> <p>"Because it's so old," Davison said. "Some of it went beyond the statute of limitations and the case could not be pursued."</p> <p>Then there are challenges like an ancient data system called DAMION that the report calls "very complex and archaic" and "introduced at a similar time to the idea of Windows" (that would be back in the mid-'80s).</p>

	<p>“It really is beyond antiquated, it is like a DOS looking system with flashing cubes. It was beyond belief,” Davison said.</p> <p>Now a new data system is on its way and Davison has built her own data team to make the best of DAMION while it still needs to be in place.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 Seattle city attorney quicker filing decisions
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-city-attorney-making-quicker-filing-decisions-prosecuting-misdemeanors-more-often-report-says/
GIST	<p>The Seattle City Attorney’s Office is making decisions on whether to prosecute misdemeanors in a fraction of the time compared to last year, and choosing to prosecute more than twice as often, according to a mandatory report prepared for the City Council and released Wednesday.</p> <p>In her campaign and since taking office, City Attorney Ann Davison promised to reduce the backlog of 5,000 misdemeanor cases without prosecution decisions and expedite decisions on new cases that come through the Criminal Division. In February, Davison announced the office would make filing decisions within five days of a new case arriving.</p> <p>Davison’s office reduced the median time to make a decision on whether to file charges in misdemeanor cases to three days, down from the 129 days it took on average from 2017-21, according to the report. With this focus on case backlogs, filing decisions on over 3,400 cases were made in the second quarter of 2022, up from about 1,960 cases with a referral decision in the same period last year. More than 900 of those were backlogged cases.</p> <p>In a Wednesday statement, Davison said she was proud of the results so far.</p> <p>“Since taking office, I have been committed to re-centering victims in the public safety system in Seattle, and the data in this report proves that we are making significant progress in delivering on this promise,” Davison said.</p> <p>Specifically, Davison said, improvements in the processing of domestic-violence charges show the efficacy of her approach. In 2021, 27% of domestic-violence referrals were declined due to difficulty in contacting victims, which Davison’s office attributes to “many victims [losing] interest in participating in their cases and witnesses [becoming] harder to contact.” In the second quarter of 2022, that number dropped to 8%.</p> <p>But as the speed of referral decisions increased, so did the likelihood of those cases being filed. According to the report, 1,754 cases were declined in the second quarter — an increase of 46% over the same period last year — and 1,708 cases were filed — a 124% increase.</p> <p>While Davison touts the benefit increased prosecution might have for victims, public defenders say increased caseloads result in scarce resources for those facing charges.</p> <p>For defenders, the influx of cases means less time to work with each client, Anita Khandelwal, director of King County’s Department of Public Defense, said Wednesday in response to the report.</p> <p>“Given that our clients are indigent and disproportionately BIPOC, this only deepens the inequities in the criminal legal system,” Khandelwal said, referring to Black, Indigenous and people of color, adding they will be “ensnared in a destabilizing and expensive system.”</p> <p>Khandelwal called the speed of filing decisions “largely irrelevant” since the number of prosecutions from the City Attorney’s Office threatens to bog down the court process and result in longer wait times for hearings.</p>

	<p>“Those charged with crimes are presumptively innocent, yet, while awaiting trial, they may be detained in jail or lose jobs, housing, and family support,” Khandelwal said.</p> <p>About 38% of the cases referred to the city attorney are allegations against Black individuals, even though only 7% of the city’s population is Black. According to Khandelwal, Davison’s approach may “perpetuate racial disproportionality in the criminal legal system” by validating Seattle Police Department referrals.</p> <p>“A commitment to equity would involve the CAO making filing decisions that reduced this disproportionality,” she added.</p> <p>A spokesperson for Davison declined to comment on the racial makeup of referrals.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/17 UN: extensive contemporary slavery exists
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/investigator-contemporary-slavery-extensive-china-88519381
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- A U.N. investigator says contemporary forms of slavery are widely practiced around the world, including forced labor for China’s Uyghur minority, bonded labor for the lowest caste Dalits in South Asia, and domestic servitude in Gulf countries, Brazil and Colombia.</p> <p>Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur Tomoya Obokata adds that traditional enslavement, especially of minorities, is found in Mauritania, Mali and Niger in Africa’s Sahel region.</p> <p>He said in a report to the U.N. General Assembly circulated Wednesday that child labor — another contemporary form of slavery — exists in all regions of the world, including its worst forms.</p> <p>“In Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, the Americas and Europe, between 4 and 6 percent of children are said to be in child labor, and the percentage is much higher in Africa (21.6%), with the highest rate in sub-Saharan Africa (23.9%),” he said.</p> <p>His conclusion about Uyghurs in China’s northwestern province of Xinjiang follows a U.S. ban imposed last December on imports from the region unless businesses can prove items are made without forced labor. There have been many claims China engages in systemic and widespread abuse of ethnic and religious minorities in its western region.</p> <p>China’s Foreign Ministry sharply criticized that finding by Obokata, who is a Japanese scholar and professor of international law and human rights at Keele University in England.</p> <p>In the report, Obokata said that based on an independent assessment of available information from many sources, including victims and government accounts, he “regards it as reasonable to conclude that forced labor among Uyghur, Kazakh and other ethnic minorities in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing has been occurring in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China.”</p> <p>He cited two systems used by China -- the detention of minorities for vocational skills education and training followed by work placement, and a poverty alleviation through labor program in which surplus rural laborers are transferred to other work. He said labor transfer is also practiced in Tibet where farmers, herders and other rural workers are transferred into low-skilled and low-paid employment.</p> <p>While these programs may create jobs and income as the government claims, Obokata said in many cases the work is involuntary and workers are subject to excessive surveillance, abusive living and working conditions, restricted movements, threats, physical or sexual violence, and other inhuman or degrading treatment.</p> <p>“Some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity, meriting a further independent analysis,” he said.</p>

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin accused Obokata of choosing "to believe in lies and disinformation about Xinjiang spread by the U.S. and some other Western countries and anti-China forces."

He also accused Obokata of abusing his authority as a special investigator to "smear and denigrate China and serve as a political tool for anti-China forces." He accused unnamed "forces" of fabricating disinformation on forced labor "to undermine Xinjiang's prosperity and stability and contain China's development and revitalization."

"China strongly condemns this," Wang said. "There has never been 'forced labor' in Xinjiang."

He said China protects the rights and interests of workers from all ethnic groups to seek employment, participate in economic and social life, "and to share the dividends of socioeconomic progress."

Obokata said minorities are also subjected to forced labor in Latin America, pointing to rural areas of Brazil, including the Amazon, where "slavery is intricately linked with economic activities that are causing environmental devastation, including illegal logging and mining." The majority of victims are men of African descent with low levels of education, he said.

The report also cited two other forms of contemporary slavery — child or forced marriage and sexual slavery.

Rates of child marriage spike in marginalized communities like the Roma minority in southeastern Europe, he said. In parts of the Balkans, half of all Roma women ages 20 to 24 are married before age 18, compared to around 10% nationally, he said.

He said official data in the United Kingdom suggest a large majority of forced marriage cases relate to Pakistan and to a lesser extent Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Somalia.

In other regions, Boko Haram has forced Christian women and girls to convert to Islam and to marry, Obokata said. Some ethnic minority groups in Nigeria practice forced or child marriage at high rates -- 74.9% among the Kambari and 73.8% among the Fulfude, he said.

Forced marriage is also a concern in the African nation of Congo, in Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam in Asia, and in Bolivia, Colombia, Honduras and Panama in Latin America, he said.

As for sexual slavery, which has been particularly notable during conflicts and humanitarian crises, Obokata pointed to the more than 6,500 women from Iraq's Yazidi minority reportedly taken captive in 2014 by Islamic State fighters who used rape as a weapon of war against them. Nearly 2,800 Yazidi women and children remain missing or in captivity today, he said.

In Ethiopia, Obokata said, minority women in the northern Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions have been subjected to rape, sexual mutilation and other forms of sexual violence by parties to the conflict.

In northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has primarily targeted Christians and moderate Muslims for enslavement, including sexual slavery, he said.

In Myanmar, women from the Rohingya Muslim minority "have been subjected to systematic sexual violence by the country's security forces which may be regarded as war crimes or crimes against humanity," he said.

Despite the persistence of contemporary forms of slavery among minorities, Obokata said governments, national human rights bodies, civil society organizations and regional and other groups "have been playing an important role in preventing the exploitation of minorities."

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